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ABSTRACT

This volume contains the four 1998 quarterly issues of this newsletter that present best practices, current research on adult learning and literacy, and information on how research is used by adult basic education teachers, counselors, program administrators, and policy makers. The following are among the major articles included: "Power, Literacy, and Motivation" (Greg Hart); "The First Three Weeks: A Critical Time for Motivation" (B. Allan Quigley); "Build Motivation by Building Learner Participation" (Barbara Garner); "Staying in a Literacy Program" (Archie Willard); "Stopping Out, Not Dropping Out" (Alisa Belzer); "Where Attendance Is Not a Problem" (Moira Lucey); "Getting into Groups" (Michael Pritza); "The GED [General Educational Development Test]: Whom Does It Help?" (John H. Tyler); "Project-Based Learning and the GED" (Anson M. Green); "Describing Program Practice: A Typology across Two Dimensions" (Barbara Garner); "Retention and the GED" (Jamie D. Barron Jones); "The Spanish GED" (Anastasia K. Cotton, Bertha Cantu-Lujan); "Changing Approaches to Math" (Cynthia J. Zengler); "Why Is Change So Hard?" (Marcia Drew Hohn); "How Teachers Change" (Virginia Richardson); "Dinosaurs and Upstarts: Organizational Change at CASA Latina" (Hilary Stern); "A Story of Improvement" (Jane Cody, James Ford, Kathleen Hayward); "Facilitating Inquiry-Based Staff Development" (Jereann King); "An Unexpected Outcome" (Edith Cowper); "Lessons from NCSALL's [National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy] Outcomes and Impacts Study" (Hal Beder); "Less Teaching and More Learning" (Susan Gaer); "Knowledge in Action: The Promise of Project-Based Learning" (Heide Spruck Wrigley); "Turning Obstacles into Opportunities" (Deborah L. Johnson); and "Voter Education, Registration, and Action (VERA)" (Andrea Nash). Each issue also contains regular features and resources. (YC)

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Focus on Basics

World Education/NCSALL, Connecting Research and Practice,
Volume 2, Issue A, March 1998

LEARNER MOTIVATION

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Focus on Basics is the quarterly publication of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. It presents best practices, current research on adult learning and literacy, and how research is used by adult basic education teachers, counselors, program administrators, and policy makers. *Focus on Basics* is dedicated to connecting research with practice, to connecting teachers with research and researchers with the reality of the classroom, and by doing so, making adult basic education research more relevant to the field.

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Focus on Basics

Welcome to *Focus on Basics*

Dear Readers,

Everyone who works in adult basic education has a story about the student who persevered despite myriad challenges. My favorite story is the class of 25 women on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), who were studying for both the tests of General Education Development (GEDs) and their nursing aide certification at the same time. After the first month of the program, I commented on their almost perfect attendance, and one student said, "I bet you didn't expect us all to be here." I told her that no, I didn't. She vowed that they woyuld all be there every month. She was right. The entire class, which had become quite a tight group, graduated. The students had near perfect attendance for nine months of class, 20 hours a week. Since the drop out rate in adult basic education programs tends to be above 50 percent, this was more than remarkable, it was astonishing.

My iinterest in "persisters" -- those who reamin in adult basic education programs and meet their educational goals despite the forces acting against them -- had begun in the same program three years earlier. I watched one class of students persevere while another class of students with similar socioeconomic make up floundered. What motivates some to persist, while others disappear?

In plaaning this issue, I sought out people who were consciously grappling with these questions and asked them to write for us. As I read the articles they submitted, each of which presents a different theory or approach to supporting learner motivation, I was struck by the role that community seems to play in all of them. Greg Hart writes that learners and program staff are motivated by event just a taste of power that community activism can convey. Was it the power, or the sense of community developed during the struggle, or both?

Allan Quigley's research suggests that staff should work quickly to identify those most likely to drop out. He found that one-on-one support and small classes work well. Michael Pritza and his colleagues switched from individualized to small group instruction and saw attendance leap. Moira Lucy obeserves that the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classroom, where learner persistence is not such a problem, provides a safe haven for learners, a place where friendships are born. Archie Willard identifies the strong relationship his tutor built with him as one key to his on-going motivation as a learner, while Marvin Lewis feels that being involved in the running of his program was a factor in his persistence. While the strategies differ, in each of these examples, a community of learners is being created and, somehow, the motivation that propelled learners to enter programs is sustained.

The drop out rate from adult basic educaation indicates that we have not managed to find the right mix of strategies to do this consistently. It does seem, however, that we are making progress. We hope that the articles in this issue provide you with ideas that will make a difference.

Sincerely,

Barbara Garner
Editor

Power, Literacy, and Motivation

by Greg Hart

"Will you support the construction of an adult education center on the south side of Tucson? Please answer YES or NO." Lina Prieto, working on her GED, the single mother of two sons, put the question to each city council member and each county supervisor as they stepped up to the microphone. It was September, 1996, and 2,000 people in the auditorium waited for each to answer. An occasional "grito" (shout) rose up out of the crowd. Even the children waited intently beside their parents, aware that something unusual was happening. Signs demanding support for adult education lined the huge room at the Tucson Convention Center and bobbed above the crowd. The politicians stepped up to the microphone one at a time to answer her. "Yes!" "Yes!" "Yes!" Eleven times "Yes!", eleven times a huge eruption of shouting from the crowd, and on the last "Yes!" we rose to our feet and raucously celebrated victory. We -- immigrants, drop outs, single mothers on welfare, minimum-wage workers, under-paid part-time adult educators -- hugged one another, waved our signs, and gave "high fives" all around. The politicians looked out with wonder over the scene until they, too, were engulfed by the thrill loose in the room. A building for adult education was going to be built, for sure, but this jubilation was about more than that. It was about power.

At Pima County Adult Education (PCAE), we have come to believe that literacy is a means to greater power and personal freedom, not an end in itself. It is the prospect of achieving power and not the concept of literacy that truly motivates both students and teachers. Lina Prieto, the other adult education students who had spoken before her, and the audience itself were acting with intent to influence their own destinies and their community. Literacy had helped them to act, but the excitement and satisfaction they felt arose from the knowledge that they were, in those moments, powerful.

My colleagues and I at PCAE have grown weary of working with people desperate to change their lives, only to contend with the fact that from one year to the next about 50 percent of PCAE's 10,000 students drop out before achieving their learning goals. We know that the reasons for that are numerous and complex, and that many are associated with what it means to be poor. We also know that some students leave because what we are able to offer as a program simply doesn't appeal to them. We believe that many students sense what some adult educators already know: that our own status as adult educators relative to other public educational institutions is a mirror image of their own powerlessness. We think that far too many conclude that getting a GED or learning to read at a higher level probably won't change their lives, and, painful as it is to admit, at PCAE we believe they may be right.

An Investment

We held a series of formal and informal meetings and discussions throughout 1992 and 1993, some in the context of a series of day-long staff retreats. As a results, we decided to invest time, energy, and money to introduce the potential for power and civic engagement in an integrated way into our curriculum. We did this to motivate students to use and respect literacy as a tool of action rather

than to regard it as a concept unrelated to the reality of their lives and their powerlessness. We also did it to motivate ourselves through deepening our commitment to the meaning and potential of our work as adult educators. The philosophies and practices of Myles Horton, the great plain-speaking American adult educator, and, to a lesser degree, his friend, the great and courageous Paulo Freire, provided fodder for our discussions and models for our actions.

An experience in 1988, when PCAE students and staff staged a large public demonstration that led to a 200 percent increase in funding, had taught us something important: students and adult educators changed when they felt they had some say in their lives. Students involved in planning and organizing the demonstration stayed involved with the program for years, some as paid teaching aides. Teachers involved in and inspired by the powerful impact on themselves and their students grew increasingly discontent with the standard academic, skills-based curriculum that, despite endless tinkering, never seemed to have an impact on attrition levels.

Despite that previous experience, however, we still didn'T know how to introduce and sustain ongoing with our students about power. We weren't entirely sure how to identify issues of common concern or how to organize broad-based civic actions and interventions designed to address them, or how we would connect all of that to the adult education classroom. We needed help to proceed. We got it, from the Pima County Interfaith Council (PCIC), an organization associated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), founded in the 1940s by the late organizer and radical Saul Alinsky. The PCIC worked originally with faith-based constituencies and a few secular institutions to research issues of importance to the Tucson community, especially those affecting the poor. Some of the issues coming to light based on PCIC's work included lack of child care and transportation, inadequate job training for living-wage jobs, low wages, latch-key children, and the disintegration of families, neighborhoods, and schools. PCIC's lead organizer and I began to meet and form the basis for a working partnership that recognized mutual interests. With PCIC's help and guidance and PCAE's commitment of training, staff time, and leadership -- including the creation of the position of Coordinator for Civics and Citizenship -- we began to convene forums and one-to-one meetings for students and staff to identify issues affecting their lives.

During these forums and one-to-one meetings, student and staff leaders began to emerge. Issues such as low wages, gang and crime-burdened neighborhoods, and parents' sense of disconnection from their children's schools came to the fore. At times with and at times without teacher guidance, small groups of students began to research issues. Their research included the analysis of public policy documents, the development of effective questions and agendas for meetings with public officials, the preparation of speeches and position papers, and learning how to reach consensus on strategy and conclusions through dialogue. The use of high level literacy skills was, of necessity, essential to all of these tasks. Training for staff and students also included public speaking skills, the mechanics of presenting at large public meetings, and conducting smaller group meetings with public officials and others. In fact, most of these activities were pointed towards meetings with public officials, of which there were eventually many. Student and staff skills were tested and refined during those encounters.

Under the guidance of the Civics and Citizenship Coordinator, six student leaders took paid positions with PCAE as student advocates and student mentors. Their responsibility included, among other things, assisting student

councils and identifying other students with leadership potential. Eventually, a core group of about 40 students and staff formed a group called the "Friends and Students of Adult Education." They continue to meet regularly and to take an active and public role in issues of concern to adult education students and adult education in general.

Staff and student participation in this civic process was and remains a matter of self selection at PCAE. Individuals determine whether or not they want to be involved and their level of involvement. They demonstrate their interest through attendance at meetings and their willingness to volunteer for assignments such as research, meetings with public officials, or disseminating and explaining information to other students and staff. At any given time at PCAE, we may have 25 or so student leaders who are actively involved and a few of hundred who stay informed by attending student council meetings and meetings of the "Friends and Students."

In the beginning of our relationship with PCIC, some of our approximately 170 staff were immediately interested, and others were skeptical. Some of those who were most cautious have since become ardent proponents of civic involvement. Others were ambivalent at the inception, and remain that way to this day. Everyone had questions and concerns: Is this type of civic involvement appropriate for an educational program? Might we lose our funding if we antagonize the powers that be or get caught up in partisan politics? Does PCIC have a hidden religious agenda? Will my job be threatened if I choose not to participate? Today, most teachers appear to be comfortable or are becoming more comfortable with PCAE's efforts to link adult literacy education with the notion of power. Clark Atkinson, a teacher with more than 25 years of varied experience as an adult educator and a strong advocate for teachers' rights, was one of the most dubious at the outset of our involvement. He said recently that he believes that our work with civic engagement has been the most important thing PCAE has ever done.

We have had a number of outward successes based on the issues identified and addressed by students and staff. They include hosting the candidates for Governor and State Superintendent of Public Instruction in our classrooms, where they were challenged to publicly commit and demonstrate support for adult education.This later materialized into a statewide family literacy initiative. Adult education students played pivotal roles in the development of a city-wide program that nearly doubled the number of after-school programs for elementary-age children. In partnership with teachers, they have formed a non-profit corporation called Adults for Community Transformation (ACT). They confronted powerful local bureaucrats over the placement of a swimming pool at a local neighborhood center instead of a long promised adult education center. Ultimately, they got not one facility, but two. They worked with staff and parents at a troubled high school to create a jobs program for students that is now being lauded and duplicated throughout the city. Hundreds of students studied interviewing skills and participated in a walking canvass of some of the city's more troubled neighborhoods and later helped to present the results to the City Council and the County Board of Supervisors. Working with some of the city's most influential political and business leaders, they have been instrumental in the creation of a new job training strategy that guarantees employer-pledged, living-wage jobs with a career path. In the spring of 1997, students worked with the Board of Supervisors to get $2.25 million included for adult education buildings in a county bond issue. After the bonds passed in a very tight election, 500 attended a County Board of Supervisors meeting in July of 1997 to successfully request that the money be allocated ahead of schedule.

These successes speak for themselves. But what about the impact on students, their learning, and their willingness to stay involved? Skills of involved individuals have certainly grown. Right now, our attrition rate remains about the same, and we report about the same number of student goals achieved as in the past. And, there has been a price to pay: power generates opposition. Former allies, both individuals and institutions, have grown distant and, in some cases, inimical, as they perceive that their interests and their access to resources may be threatened by an active adult education constituency competing for those same resources. The risk is real that in questing for power we might lose some, or, in the worst case, all of our ability to even offer educational programs. We might lose our jobs, too. We also clearly recognize another risk: that we as teachers, i.e., the literate, might exploit students. That possibility requires constant vigilance and introspection. The buildings we have won, for example, cannot just end up being nicer places to work for adult educators; they must serve and strengthen the adult learner community. We must be vigilant also that PCAE itself is not similarly exploited by the IAF or PCIC for their own purposes.

We will not understand the full impact of our work for many years to come. We have shown ourselves that linking literacy education with the notion of power transforms the perspectives and motivations of educators and students alike. We have seen people's lives and the lives of their families change. When GED student Lina Prieto, who questioned city and county officials, speaks powerfully to a room of 2,000 people, she knows she has the ability to influence the direction of her community: she has power. Her seven-year-old son sitting in the audience sees it, too. When teachers see students involved in the civic process, they recognize that they themselves are engaged in meaningful work: they have power. When government officials see that the community they serve has a voice, they see that power belongs rightfully to the people. For the people at PCAE involved in this process, adult literacy education, and power will never rightfully be separate from one another again.

About the Author

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The First Three Weeks: A Critical Time for Motivation

by B. Allan Quigley

"Isn't there anything I can do to keep my students motivated?" This is the question I asked back in 1972, when I lost two students from my first adult basic education (ABE) class. At the time, my reaction was: "I must do better." I tried harder. I searched for more and better materials. I employed the best techniques I could find. I was as supportive as any teacher could be. But, somehow, even with my best efforts, things didn't change much. Some students stayed. Some didn't. I just couldn't get a handle on it. My best wasn't enough.

In the late 1970s, as an ABE program director, my staff and I tried everything we could think of to improve our retention rates. We had full-time, part-time, and drop-in courses. We had block and continuous intake. We had centralized and decentralized classes around the city. We had large individualized classes, team-taught classes, childcare in some, computers in others. Still, even with our best ideas and best efforts, some students dropped out while others persisted. Our collective best still wasn't enough.

Entering doctoral studies in 1984, I believed the books in the library would hold the answers. However, after working on this issue for almost 11 years as a professor and researcher, I still don't have the answer. A quarter century of worrying about the same question is a long time. I nevertheless think the contemporary literature and some of what I have found recently may be taking me closer to a better understanding of how to keep students motivated. While others may disagree, I like to think we are getting closer to answers. Let's see.

Different Perspectives

Looking back, I think neither my excellent co-workers nor I were really able to analyze our world because -- and here's the conundrum -- we saw it as our world. You might notice in the above story that at no point did my co-workers and I draw upon the perspective of the learners. I think this is a serious self-limiting condition in ABE. As educators, we often seek to reproduce the experiences that worked for us. Most of us basically liked school and succeeded at the schooling process. Educators have a common experience that separates us from our students. The culture of school that we so enjoyed is not necessarily a culture into which our students fit. We must keep that in mind when we design programs and instruction.

Our learners are not a "different species," as some would have us believe (Quigley, 1997), and I must say immediately that I hate the negative stereotypes of our learners. Yet the common characteristics within our learner population, the one that distinguishes it from other populations in the educational spectrum, is that most of our students dropped out of school. Furthermore, most did so under unhappy circumstances. While our learners have many characteristic in common with mainstream adult students, they also have some radical differences. We can certainly learn from theories and research done with the larger adult population in mind, but we cannot extrapolate freely.

A Framework

That said, a model provided by Patricia Cross in 1982 suggests that ABE learners -- like all adult learners -- must overcome three barriers to enroll and stay in ABE classes. First, ABE learners, like all the rest, must negotiate family, financial, health, transportation, and other problems if they are to come and to stay. These are the situational barriers; they arise out of learners' day-to-day lives. Many researchers have identified and discussed these barriers in ABE (see, for instance, Hayes, 1988; Malicky and Norman, 1994; Wikelund, Reder, & Hart-Landsberg, 1992). Second, ABE learners, like adult learners everywhere, must confront the institutional barriers our agencies seem inevitably to create. Which adult students don't have to deal with some type of institutional red tape, or program fee, or scheduling inconvenience at their learning institutions? Our learners face institutional rules and procedures that too often seem to serve the institution, not the learners. So, when we add up the problems that may cause learners to leave, we can separate some of them into these two categories, situational and institutional.

We can try to help our students with the situations they face by referring them to resources. But we can only refer them, we canÕt be the resources. Situational barriers are often those about which we in ABE can do very little. This is an area where we need to realize our limitations and reduce the personal guilt we feel when we see our students floudering in the face of these barriers.

Likewise, we can and should keep chipping away at institutional barriers -- we do have some control over these -- but, again, I don't think this is where we should expend most of our energy. I have become convinced that the third barrier holds the most promise. The third -- and most enigmatic by far -- is the area of dispositional barriers. Herein lies the curious inner world of unique attitudes, personal values, and unstated perceptions. Our learners often carry into our programs mixed emotions, many of which are negative, born of past schooling experiences. These may take up more space in their dispositional baggage than we usually want to acknowledge or are willing to explore.

Our students come to our programs with hopes, fears, and expectations, just like other adult learners. But, as I have said, our students' feelings grow from negative schooling experiences. The "answers" we offer may exacerbate the problems they bring. Faced with students who show low self-esteem or an apparent lack of confidence in ABE programs, Fingeret (1985) found that ABE teachers often "try to be all things to each individual student&334 (p. 112). But, as Fingeret concludes, even the total devotion of a caring teacher in the face of apparent low self-esteem may not be enough. While Fingeret agrees that such "are admirable aspirations it is possible that instructors ... may actually undermine the adult student's ability to use the program as an area for risk-taking, growth, and learning" (p. 112). As Fingeret found: "Many students do not simply remain in a program because it feels good' to them. They remain because they see the potential for meeting their goals" (p. 112). I would add, despite the unquestionable value of a caring teacher and learner-centered approaches, these are not the singular answers for retention. If they were, the dropout rate in the U.S. would not have been a staggering 74 percent in the 1993-94 year (U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

I now believe that the gap in perception created by our school-based experiences, when contrasted with those of our students, is a source of serious unseen, under-researched problems. I think that if we can understand dispositional barriers better, if we can see the differences between our

dispositions and theirs more clearly, we can become more effective at our tutoring, teaching, counseling, and retention.

Dispositional Barriers

As I noted earlier, schooling experiences in the formative years have a lifelong effect on learners. Cervero and Fitzpatrick (1990) found, through a longitudinal study of 18,000 students from 1,200 U.S. schools, that adults who had been early school-leavers -- drop outs -- had extremely mixed feelings toward past schooling. Early school leavers participated in credit and non-credit adult education opportunities at a rate well below the norm for mainstream adults who had completed school. The researchers concluded that those who quit school are "shaped...by a powerful set of social circumstances" (p. 92).

Taking the same point further, Wikelund, Reder, & Hart-Landsberg (1992) found that undereducated adult "participants and potential participants tend to perceive and experience the adult education programs...as extensions or continuations of the school programs in which they have previously experienced failure, loss of self-esteem, and lack of responsiveness to their personal needs and goals" (p. 4). This is another important conclusion that can help us think more critically about our programs.

In a study I conducted in 1992, we held in-depth interviews with potential students who chose not to attend ABE programs even though they knew they were probably eligible to attend. We found that the terms education' and learning' were understood positively if applied to the children and the friends of the resisters. These two constructs implied absolute good. When we mentioned ABE' or literacy' -- when we flat out asked if they would go to the local ABE programs and register -- they heard school.' They said they did not want to "go back to school" although we had never used that word.

Theories of Participation

If we turn to research on the psychological and socio-cultural and socio-economic factors that go into motivation, we come away disappointed. But we have no lack of advice. In the past, our field was advised to address motivation and participation using mainstream adult education models. Boshier (1973), and Rubenson and Hogheim (1978), for instance, have argued that mainstream adult education theories should be used in ABE settings. In 1986, Gordon Darkenwald wrote that if we would just use such mainstream adult theories "The quality of ABE participation and dropout research would be vastly improved" (p. 12). Maybe, but, given the differences in learner populations, it does not necessarily follow that mainstream adult education research applies to ABE.

Another model we could consider is Miller's 1960's force field analysis (1967), which says that certain influences pull adults towards a desired goal as other influences push them away. In the classic Miller force-field theory, we need to research the forces acting on students via a force-field analysis. Miller's theory is, however, constructed on socio-economic status, ignoring prior education and its effects.

Peter Cookson's (1987) ISSTAL model argues that an individual's social background and roles, combined with a list of other external and internal elements, can act as a series of filters. These either discourage or challenge the learner to the point where she will either engage in further education or choose

not to participate. Actually, Patricia Cross (1982, p. 124) had much the same idea in her chain-of-response (COR) model a few years earlier. For Cross, the adult's decision process begins with self-evaluation and moves through a predictable sequence of links. So, according to Cookson and Cross, if we can just know the filters and links in the sequence, we can predict who will participate. Neither Cookson nor Cross explicitly includes the powerful effects of pre-adult factors such as past educational experiences in their equations.

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) created a model that does allow for several pre-adult influences. Their model takes into consideration eight groups of factors from the prospective learner's experience. This seems relevant until we notice that all types of educational goals and participation are lumped together. Credit-bearing, noncredit-bearing, and variations of both are assumed to be essentially the same, and labeled further adult education. Where does ABE fit into this mix of mainstream goals? Does this theory really do justice to the formative experiences of our learners? More recent research by Roberta Uhland (1995) and researchers at the Center for Literacy Studies (1992) tells us this adult mainstream view of educational attainment can vastly oversimplify the ABE learner's decision process (and see Beder, 1990).

Perhaps the theory that, more than any other, perpetuated stereotyping in ABE was Roger Boshier's congruence model (1973, 1977). It classes all potential participants into growth-oriented and deficiency-oriented learners. Boshier effectively says that low-literate adults are at the rock bottom of any Maslowian hierarchy of needs based on 48 motives. They are so seriously deficiency-oriented in the motives department that it would seem almost impossible for our learners to be motivated at all. As Beder (1990) says, Boshier "perpetuates the very social stigma attached to low literacy which limits life success and reduces motivation (p. 44).

On the other hand, perhaps the most promising theory for our field from mainstream higher and adult education is the Vroom (1964) expectancy-valence model. It promotes research on two levels of inquiry. First, it asks what the learners' expectations are of the upcoming experience, or program, in this case. Second, it tries to measure the inherent valence -- or worth -- of a program as the learner sees it. The strength of these two, says Vroom, will determine participation and success. While expectancy- valence theory has been used with some success in our field (e.g., Van Tilburg & DuBois, 1989; Quigley, 1992, 1993), we are not sure how dispositional barriers interact with what learners find in programs. We don't really know how expectancy and valence interacts with dispositional barriers. And note that all of the above are theories of participation. They are asking: What influences adults to join programs? They are not explicitly focused on retention: "What influences them to stay or quit?&334

The Drop-Out Weeks

We need to go beyond participation theory and find a way to understand what our learners actually experience during the first three critical "drop-out weeks." We do have some understanding of this period, and we have some strategies worth using.

An interesting study by Christophel and Gorham (1995) may be appropriate for us, even though it is based on college students. This study has to do with in-program, not before-program, questions. The researchers found that among young adults in college, motivation "is perceived by students as a personally-owned state, while demotivation is perceived as a teacher-owned

problem" (p. 303).

While this finding has yet to be tested in ABE settings, it does make a potentially useful contribution. It introduces the demotivation side of learner experience. And it does square with ABE retention and persistence work (e.g., Bean et al, 1989; Diekhoff & Diekhoff, 1984), which indicates that our learners tend to come to ABE with sufficient motivation to succeed, but things happen that, through their eyes at least, "demotivate" them. It gives us language and a framework to continue the line of reasoning that persistence and motivation are not ultimately "their" problem.

This line of demotivation research also indicates that "motivation is modifiable" (Christophel & Gorham, p. 304). Squaring with the nascent ABE retention research, it suggests that teachers can do something. One positive way intervention can occur, according to Chrisophel and Gorham, is if teachers respond to student needs right away. They call this teacher-immediacy. As they learned, "teacher immediacy affects motivation." (p. 304). My own research suggests that "nonverbal immediacy relationships are more slowly established than are verbal immediacy relationships" (p. 304). The point here is that early verbal connections with new learners are critical in sustaining motivation.

The value of teacher immediacy was also demonstrated by a study I conducted in 1993. Through in-depth interviews that contrasted persisters with dropouts, two interviewers found that a randomly selected group who had dropped out of an ABE program in the first three weeks due to evident dispositional barriers had chosen not to talk with their teachers about their decision to quit during the decision period. Instead, they had all gone to the intake counselor. One had done do so up to seven separate times prior to dropping out. This is potentially disconcerting for teachers. In contrast, those in the study who persisted for months did not go to the counselor once in the same critical period. Instead, persisters talked to their ABE teachers regularly. Thus, the "immediacy" role of the intake counselor or intake person may be at least as important as the role of the teachers among the potential dropout population.

Those learners asking for counselor assistance were not the ones who, to the teacher, appeared to need assistance. They were basically invisible in the classrooms. It was the potential persisters who squeaked and seemed to get noticed.

As time goes by, say Christophel and Gorham, the teacher-learner relationship becomes increasingly important in sustaining student motivation. They make it clear that the first few weeks are crucial. If teacher immediacy is not established early, the odds that students will drop out increase. It is imperative that we figure out who needs such attention.

Identification

Most programs have an intake person. It may be a counselor, a teacher, a receptionist, or the program administrator. Research I have done (Quigley, 1997) suggests that some new learners -- not all -- will need more attention than others, both inside and outside the classroom. I believe it is worth building a sensitive interviewing process for new learners at initial contact, and right after intake, and to use the same personnel to follow up with learners who need more attention. It is also advisable that this person, or persons, not be the same as those actually teaching the learner. As I will explain, some learners may need a safety valve. To make this degree of interview and follow-up manageable, consider ways for staff -- not only the teachers -- to look systematically for

"at-risk indicators" (Quigley & Kuhne, 1997). "At risk" here means those learners who probably have the highest chance of dropping out in the first few critical weeks by virtue of the dispositional barriers they must overcome. The overall logic here is that some new students have more significant dispositional barriers than others. These "at-risk" learners can often be identified and assisted to stay in programs longer.

The study we conducted involved 20 at-risk learners and a control group. The intake counselor, a male, looked for body language and verbal cues that suggested dispositional barriers were at work, barriers sufficient to cause the applicant to drop out early on. These cues included skepticism, hostility, hesitancy, and uncertainty. This observation occurred during a meeting at the beginning of the program. The second meeting was the student intake, about two weeks later, during which the counselor once again looked for the same behaviors and attitudes. At this point, if he saw the same behaviors or attitudes, he referred the student to another counselor, a female. She conducted a more in-depth interview with the new learner about her past schooling experiences. Having toured the program by now, the student was asked to compare the past with her future expectations for this program. The Prior Schooling and Self-Perception Inventory, which contrasts aspect of past performance and relations with peers with what the potential learner was anticipating in this program, was created and used for this more lengthy interview (Quigley, 1997, pp. 245- 246).

With these three procedures, we had identified an at-risk group: learners we hypothesized were especially susceptible to demotivators. But now what? Remember how we usually place so much emphasis on a caring teachers' ability to raise self-concept? Other possibilities were tested. Those who now appeared to be at-risk were referred at random to four separate classroom settings. None were aware they were part of a study. The first randomly selected group was referred to the mainstream just like the others that came to the center. This control group was placed among the usual classes of anywhere from 15 to 20 students, taught by one teacher. Another randomly selected group received team support. This meant their teacher was made aware they were at-risk students and the female counselor visited each in this group at least once per week. The counselor and teacher used the Inventory as a baseline to see how the learner was progressing. So, this "team-supported group" received all the support that a teacher and a counselor could possible give within the program's structure. We hypothesized that if caring teachers and counselors are vital to retention, this approach would result in the highest student retention rate. The third randomly selected group went to small classes of five or six students. This option played down the teacher's importance; we hypothesized that more peer attention, not just more teacher attention, would have a positive impact on retention. The final randomly selected group were assigned to one-on-one volunteer tutors rather than to a classroom, giving them the most teacher attention one could ever get in ABE.

What happened? All three special treatment groups retained students past three weeks and beyond the control group. Our goal was met. The small group option held the most students the longest. This suggests that increased peer support as well as enhanced teacher support for the at-risk, through the small group setting during the first three weeks, may provide an "absence of negatives" sufficient for many at-risk learners. In all events, any of the three treatments were an improvement over the traditional classroom for the at-risk.

Implications

What does this suggest for program design? First, identify those least likely to stay. The at-risk group should be identified by an experienced intake person in the first one-on-one meeting. These observations should be verified during a second interview, using the Prior Schooling and Self-Perception Inventory (Quigley, 1997). Although using this instrument hardly constitutes scientific prediction, it at least provides a profile based on the new students' own expressed expectations and personal concerns. And it grounds observed behaviors and learner self-perceptions in dispositional barriers. I recommend also using the Witkin Embedded Figures Test (Quigley, 1997; Witkin et al, 1971). This test assesses learners' field dependence and field independence, which, simply put, means levels of needing to belong.

This means making informed judgements early on in programs. Some programs will be able to place the at-risk in classes of five or six students. Some will not. Most programs can have the intake person act as follow-up support to the at-risk by meeting with these students individually at least once a week to go over their progress, using the Inventory as a baseline. The follow-up should include informing the teacher that these students will need more support than others, even if they do not always request it. Finally, the intake person and the teachers can meet and work as a team. In any case, the intake person should be someone other than the teacher so that another interested person is available to the students. This provides a second, less symbolically authoritative figure with whom the at-risk can consult.

Other team support techniques suggest themselves here. Groups within classrooms can be formed to create a smaller peer support group for the at-risk. After-class support groups can be created and the at-risk can be encouraged to attend. Approaches such as mentoring and "buddy systems" can be used with good effect. The idea is to build more support for the at-risk using peers as well as teachers and intake personnel. Finally, many programs can add volunteer tutors to ABE programs, either in or outside of ABE classrooms. The last model tried in the study was to give fuller attention through tutors. It worked better than nothing did. Why not add a tutor to help the at-risk in ABE if this is the approach available?

No one is suggesting that situational and institutional barriers will not creep up on many learners during or after the critical three weeks. We are dealing with adults here. Little is predictable; less is "controllable." But, based on this study and the success of programs that have acted on these same suggestions, we know that we can: 1) understand the time frame in which we must identify the at-risk, 2) identify an at-risk group upon which to focus energy, and 3) employ various groupings found to provide support for the at-risk. Above all, we can at least begin to untangle some of the complex issues of retention and make a better, more informed start. Yes, there is something I can do.

The Answer

If I knew how to enhance motivation, I would have done it 20 years ago. I only wish I had taken the time to question, to analyze, and to be more self-critical in ways that allowed for greater learner input. The efforts of recent researchers, and emerging trends such as action research for the classroom (Quigley & Kuhne, 1997) are positive.

Here are some questions I think we should be asking. What are the differences -- dispositional, cognitive, age, gender, and cultural -- between those who stay and those who do not? What is the actual process of disengagement? Are there stages of dropout? Do demotivators -- especially things done or not done by the

teacher -- trigger them? What role does learning style play in motivation? And how can we -- practitioners, researchers, and learners alike -- share and learn from our experiences so that, as a field, we are not reinventing the same disjointed solutions? In my view, just being able to communicate and share ideas through such means as Focus on Basics is a major step forward.

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Build Motivation by Building Learner Participation

by Barbara Garner

The Goodwill Learning Center in Seattle is in an enviable position: supported by Goodwill Industries and private grants, it is not dependent upon government funds. The staff are free to experiment. Students suggest courses, and those with special skills teach them to others. The current roster of classes includes traditional topics such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), math, reading, writing, and preparation for the tests of General Educational Development (GED). At the students'suggestion, the roster also includes public speaking, passing the written driving exam, small business, and cash English. In cash English, students learn the standard spoken English they need to succeed in the formal economy.

Director Pat Russell-Sims feels that participation motivates students, builds their confidence, and opens them to new vistas. At the Goodwill Learning Center, participation comes in two forms. It can mean being involved with the general running of the school; it can also mean being involved with other students. Learners, who include those studying ESOL and all levels of adult basic education (ABE), participate in hiring staff and in setting organizational policy. The students in each class determine their own rules; for example, students decide whether snacks can be eaten during class, whether children can be brought to class, and whether homework should be given. There's a peer tutoring program, and four of the Center's staff of seven are former students, which indicates that student involvement works.

Despite the Center's commitment to the concept, building student participation isn't easy. A student council started a number of years ago by a small group of active students provided the Center with a way to get student input. The group didn't grow, however, and when the core members graduated, it faltered.

To complement the work of the student council, another group of students started a newsletter. They write, lay out, and circulate the two-page publication. Students get copies in their mailboxes every week or so. It is entitled the *Goodwill Community Learning Center Student Newsletter, News By, For, and About Students.*

To further increase student participation in the overall running of the school, the Learning Center has instituted quarterly all-school meetings for the students. "We thought about calling them assemblies,'" explains Marvin Lewis, a former student and now an Americorps volunteer responsible for student involvement, " but assemblies means high school, and lots of people don't like that." To prevent classes from being interrupted, the first two meetings did not coincide with class time. Of approximately 175 students enrolled at the time, about 55 attended each of the first two meetings. They broke up into small groups to generate suggestions about how to improve the Center. Their lists included a request for child care and more computer classes; the administration is looking into the feasibility of both. Another request, for more ESOL classes, was fulfilled almost immediately.

Not happy with the attendance at all-school meetings, the Learning Center is experimenting with ways to increase it. They're particularly concerned with attracting night students. Now, all school meetings are held during regular class time. The Center will hold two meetings a quarter, one during the day and one in the evening, so students who go to class in the evening can attend. They serve food: donuts, croissants, bagels, fruit, and juice.

To broaden ownership of the meetings, responsibility for facilitation rotates. " A lot of students bring a lot of experience with them -- from church or other places, " Lewis points out, and the Center runs a public speaking class, so finding students to facilitate isn't hard. Lewis works with the facilitators, helping them prepare for the meeting.

Lewis is an example of a student whose motivation was enhanced by being given the opportunity to participate in the running of his school. He shares his story with us here. He would be the first to admit that, while building learner participation is not easy, it can be effective.

Staying in a Literacy Program

by Archie Willard

I was 54 years old when I got started in a literacy program. It was one of the hardest things I have ever done. I had struggled all my life with my reading and had been told so many times that I could not learn to read. That had always bothered me. Deep down inside, I thought I could do better than what others had said about me. Getting started in a reading program was one of the best things I have ever done for myself. After my first reading lesson I told myself, " I'm going to try to make a difference in the literacy field."

When I was five years old and started kindergarten I was right in the middle of everything at school. I was eager to learn. Sometime in the first grade when I had my first reading lesson, things changed. I really struggled in that lesson. From then on the teacher's voice seemed different when she talked to me. When the other children in my class did things, I was not included anymore. So, when we had reading class, I just sat down in my seat and tried not to be noticed. I would be so worried about being called on to read that I lost the concentration that I needed as well as the content of the lesson. I lived in fear, thinking I was not good enough to learn how to read. It was not long after that first reading lesson that I gave up on being a formal learner. Then, after time went by, I became angry because I was being left out of the mainstream of life. I didnt want to be an angry person, but it just happened.

I faintly remember that there were some meetings between my mother and someone from the school. But this was the 1930's, and no one understood learning disabilities then. If you were not learning to read, you were looked at as a dummy. My mother could not read very well and she could not help me with my school work. As I look at my dyslexia and my symptoms I can see some of these same symptoms in my mother's life. I now feel that she must have been dyslexic, too. My father could read quite well but he was a conductor on the Chicago Northwestern Railroad and he worked ten to 12 hours a day, sometimes seven days a week. He did not have the time or energy to help me. My parents were kind to me and encouraged me to do the best that I could do in school. There was a lot of love in our home and it was a place where I could escape from all the frustration at school.

My teacher placed me in the back of the room away from the rest of the students. I was in a room full of other students, but I felt like I was there all alone. I was passed from grade to grade. I graduated from high school, and because I did well in football I attended college and I played football there for two years. Then I was told that I could no longer stay in school because my grades were not good enough. When I left school, I took a lot of frustration and anger with me. I then went to work for Hormel Packing Company. I worked with my hands and did not need to know how to read. I married, and my wife and I had one child, a daughter. Hormel was a good company to work for and my family got along fine financially. I worked there for 31 years until the plant closed and I received early retirement.

One day in 1984, my wife read a newspaper article about Bruce Jenner, who had won a gold medal in the 1976 Olympics. The article told about his athletic

achievements, but it also told about his being dyslexic. My wife suggested that the "symptoms " of dyslexia that Bruce Jenner exhibited could have been a description of me. That story started me thinking that maybe I had a learning disability. Maybe I wasn't a dummy, after all, as I had been told so many times at school! I was motivated to be tested to see if I had a learning disability. I then went to the University of Iowa Hospitals and was diagnosed as having dyslexia. I was elated to finally know that there was a reason why I had struggled to learn to read.

I decided that I was going to seek reading help and, at age 54, enrolled in an adult reading program at Iowa Central Community College to make changes in my life and to try again. I wanted a quick fix. I hoped that I could learn to read in three to six weeks, then leave the program and never look back. Of course it never happened that way. It had been 34 years since I had been in school and it was hard to get over the hump and get started again. After the experiences from my school years, I came into the program with a lot of frustration and was defensive. I would rather be looked at as someone who didn't care about learning to read than someone who cannot learn to read. Until I saw the program and tutor as non-threatening, I could not start learning to read again.

My tutor was a retired adult basic education program administrator. She had never tutored anyone before. She worked with me from her heart. She was not going to let me get out of this program without teaching me to read. She asked me to do reading outside of class. I did not want to be seen at the public library getting books that were at my reading level, so I read 26 Nancy Drew books which my daughter had collected when she was a young girl.

My tutor had an ability to look at me and see the little things that could keep me going in the program. We started each lesson talking about things that had happened in the world since our last lesson. Sometimes we would read from the newspaper to help in our discussion. She helped involve me in what was happening in our community. Every second Thursday, the public library held noon programs with presentations about various topics. After our lesson on those days, she and I would take sack lunches and go to these presentations. My tutor became someone I could call "friend." Because of this friendship, I felt comfortable in this reading program and I wanted to work harder to improve my reading.

One of the most important things my tutor did for me was to enable me to function in my new job. Although I had received early retirement from Hormel Packing Company, this retirement pay was not going to keep a family of three going without some supplemental income. I still needed to work. It was hard to find a job for someone over 50 who couldn't read. I feel that because my wife helped fill out my application and I did well in my interview, I got a job as an insurance adjuster with Farmers Mutual Hail Insurance Company. This job was extremely hard for me to do, but my tutor helped me learn how to spell words that were used in insurance. We practiced writing insurance reports. Because of her help I was able to work for this company for 14 years.

About a year after I got into my reading program, when I was ready to do more, my tutor got me involved in other parts of the program. I did public speaking, I told my life story to schools, I was on the advisory board for the reading program, I went to a support group, I helped plan the first Iowa State Literacy Congress, and I grew from all this. All of this involvement also helped me to keep going. I began to feel good about what I was doing. The more I reached out, the more confidence I gained. I became open about having dyslexia.

My tutor then encouraged me to find out more about my learning disability, dyslexia. I attended an Iowa State Orton Dyslexia Conference. I learned that 70 to 80 percent of the adults who seek reading help have some kind of a learning disability. I went to more conferences to learn more, and began meeting and networking with people who were professionals in the learning disability field. I heard researcher Dr. Albert Galberta tell about his work and how cells (ectopic cells) get misplaced in the development of the brains of dyslexics, which causes us to have processing problems. Again, I subconsciously heard, "You are not a dummy! You can learn, but you learn differently."

I stayed in my reading program for two and a half years. Many things kept me going. Initially, perhaps the most important motivation to me was that I wanted to prove to myself and the rest of the world that I was not a dummy. This motivation led to learning which led to more motivation to learn more... Somehow I got a spark in my life and I became a formal learner again. Another thing that helped me was to stand up and say, "I'm an adult learner." This forced me to set standards for myself because others were watching me as an adult who was learning to read. My wonderful tutor, my understanding of dyslexia, my involvement in literacy issues, the discovery of who I am, were some of the things that motivated me. The chemistry in my home helped to keep me going. I got all the encouragement and support I could want from my wife and daughter who was a senior in high school at the time. I knew that had I not sought reading help, my family would have been very disappointed. My learning to read was so important to my daughter, that when she went off to college at the University of Iowa, she became a volunteer tutor to teach adults to read at nearby Kirkwood Community College. She then organized other college students to become tutors and they helped other adults to read.

Twelve years have passed. I am not an adult literacy student anymore, but I continue to learn. I have kept up on what the latest research has found in the field of learning disabilities. I have traveled many miles advocating for literacy. I have attended Individual Educational Plan meetings at the request of parents. I'm on three different literacy boards. I have continued to do public speaking about adult literacy and about dyslexia. This has taken me to schools, universities, national conferences, and churches. I have had the opportunity to go to Eastern Europe in 1993 and in 1995 to study how learning disabilities are dealt with there. I now work as an adult literacy coordinator for Iowa Central Community College in Fort Dodge, Iowa. Each fall I teach an adult education class at several Iowa community colleges about understanding learning disabilities. In 1996 I completed a fellowship with The National Institute for Literacy.

Last summer, five other adult learners and I organized and conducted a leadership workshop for adult learners at Illinois State University. The six of us are now working with mentors to plan a March 1998 meeting at the Highlander Retreat near Knoxville, Tennessee, to form an adult learner national organization. I have a passion to bring adult learners together and to help them find themselves in life and to continue to make a difference in literacy.

Stopping Out, Not Dropping Out

Students and teachers may perceive withdrawing from a program differently

by Alisa Belzer

To plan this issue, I read many research studies, some quantitative, some qualitative, some teacher research, others done by academics. Alisa Belzer's examination of the process that learners go through in deciding to stay or leave a program and the many factors that influence them presented many findings worthy of discussion, but one in particular intrigued me. She found that some students who were defined as "drop outs " by their literacy programs did not consider themselves as such. This difference in perception can have strong implications for the services we deliver. I asked Alisa to share this aspect of her research with us.

-- Barbara Garner

When I was teaching and students stopped coming to class or to tutoring sessions, I never really knew quite what to think. Sometimes I blamed myself: "If only I were a better teacher." Sometimes I felt angry at the student, "If only she could get her life together." And sometimes I offered myself a structural interpretation related to the challenges that learners face: "No wonder she can't keep coming, look at what she is contending with...." In fact, I really couldn't explain it.

In 1991, I had the opportunity to lead a systematic exploration of the issue.1 Although I did not conduct the study in my own classroom, the questions I asked and methods I used grew out of my experiences as a teacher and coordinator as well as those of my colleagues in a large, urban literacy program.

It seemed unlikely to me that a learner left or stayed in a program based on any one factor. It seemed more likely that a feeling or attitude about leaving the program developed and a decision got made over time. I designed a study aimed at understanding this complex process better. I was particularly interested in the interaction between the expectations learners brought to a program, their life experiences, and what the program had to offer. I gathered data on the expectations the learners brought, obstacles they and their teachers and tutors encountered, ways in which learners and teachers perceived staying in or leaving a program, and the strategies teachers and tutors employed to promote retention in the program.

One of the assumptions I had, which this article will focus on, was that if students feel badly about leaving a program, it may be difficult for them to return at a later date. This raised the question: How do students feel about leaving? In gathering and analyzing data, I focused in on this issue.

Sample

To carry out the study, I used qualitative research methods to gain multiple perspectives on the process of participation in an adult literacy program from

the point of view of learners, staff, and tutors over time. Four educators -- two teachers and two volunteer tutor coordinators -- randomly recruited two to three learners each to participate in the study. The only criteria for selection that they used were that the learners have phones and be willing to be interviewed. The group of students consisted of five individuals participating in three different classes and five individuals receiving tutoring in two different areas of the city. Beyond stratifying for type of learning context, the sample was one of convenience.

Process

The study followed ten students from entry into the program for up to four months or until they dropped out. A former staff member and I gathered the data. We planned periodic contact in the form of face-to-face or telephone interviews with students, as well as with their teachers for those in classes, and with the tutors and coordinators of those receiving tutoring, conducting a total of 102 interviews. The ten students were interviewed 47 times, the four volunteer tutors -- one tutor became inactive almost immediately after the study began -- were interviewed 19 times, and teachers and coordinators were interviewed 36 times. One tutor remained active in the program only briefly and did not make himself available for an interview. Of the ten adult learners who participated in the study, five of them were still participating regularly in the program at the end of the study.

Perceptions of Stopping

When students stop coming to a program, how do they perceive this action? This was one of the questions in which I was interested. We were surprised to find that the students who left the program did not seem to consider themselves "drop outs." No one would go so far as to say that she had quit the program. Each of those who left planned to return in the future. While they had stopped coming, their intentions to participate had not ended. Although they did not necessarily know when they would be able to return, they all believed it would be possible and desirable to do so. Of perhaps even greater importance to me was that no one expressed a sense of personal failure because of leaving the program. Rather, each simply felt that it was no longer possible for them to continue at that time. They attributed this to factors beyond their control a job, health problems, financial problems, legal problems, or other personal and family problems that would have to solve themselves.

This raises questions for educators who work hard to help learners avoid a feeling of failure. For the most part, the learners we interviewed who stopped coming neither felt they had failed, nor did they feel the program had failed. Instead, they communicated a feeling that the circumstances of their lives had made it impossible to continue.

The learners' sense that they have little or no control over circumstances seems in some ways destructive. It implies to me a certain sense of powerlessness and suggests that these learners, at least, may feel unable to get around obstacles not necessarily insurmountable to others. It is also, however, a protective stance. It means that students can leave a program without feeling bad about themselves for being "drop-outs." This, in turn, seems to leave the door open for a return to the program in the future. The fact that nine out of the ten adults in the study had participated in some kind of adult education at least once before and chosen to begin anew seems to bear this assumption out.

Students expressed the belief that they have not "completed" the program until they reached their goals.Yet, stopping periodically was not viewed as quitting. Most focussed on what they had been able to accomplish during their time in the program, however brief. For example, one student, who had stopped for health reasons, reported that after her time in the program, she was doing more reading and comprehending better. "I feel good about myself...I'm accomplishing something," she said. Another student who remained in the program throughout the study stated that had she been forced to drop out, she would not have felt like a failure. Rather, she would feel good about the fact that she had made the effort and "I would just go to class the next year or to some other class." A student who was re-entering the program for the third time when the study began explained that she had never felt like a failure when she left in the past because she always knew that she would return. She believed that this in-and-out pattern of participation would serve her until she is able to reach her goals. Two students did admit that if they quit, they would feel unhappy. One said, "If I quit, I wouldn't like myself. This time I'd rather finish all the way." The other said that if she dropped out she "would feel blue for a while." Fortunately both of these students persisted despite severe obstacles."

Implications

If one agrees with the study participants' perceptions that departure from a program should not necessarily be viewed as a failure, but rather as a temporary hiatus, the question then arises: what implications does this have for programs? Teachers and tutors could make sure that students have materials they can work on outside of class or tutoring; they should also ensure that learners know how to use those materials. Program staff could emphasize life-long learning skills, such as encouraging the habit of reading and writing every day, so that students continue practicing their literacy skills when they are unable to attend. In addition, programs might want to consider printing and distributing class lists for students to encourage contact between students outside of class. On a broader scale, teachers and program managers should plan their program structures, curricula, and assessment procedures on the assumption that even under the best of circumstances, students will come and go, and, hopefully, come again.

Many of the other findings from this study, not detailed here, af firm the notion that attempts to increase retention based on a cause and effect explanation, to frame the issue in terms of single differentiated obstacles, or to assume that decisions around dropping out come at a single point in time, are missing out on much of the complexity of the issue. The question of how to improve student retention cannot be solved with simple or single answers. The same obstacles or supports can create different outcomes for different students. Since often many complicated and interrelated factors are involved in the decision to continue participation in a program, a simple or single solution may make no difference. It is, however, still useful to try to identify potential obstacles, whether they arise during the recruitment and enrollment phase or as a student participates in a program, and to seek strategies that can help retention.

The sample size of this study was small and the time for data collection was relatively short. As with all qualitative studies, the findings here are not necessarily generalizable to an entire population. Rather, they are meant to be suggestive and provocative. I am hoping that this study can help practitioners reconsider a familiar problem in a new way and that it can help clarify understandings of a complex issue through learning about the perspectives of a small group of students and the literacy practitioners with whom they worked. It can neither provide the field with definitive answers of how to cure retention

problems nor suggest how to motivate all students. It can help us to think hard about how we formulate programs, curricula, and learning contexts that best respond to the realities of adult learners' lives.

Other Questions

Many retention questions remain to be investigated, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Although this study has strongly suggested that no single answers to improving retention exist, data on various program factors would certainly aid programs in their efforts. Here are some of the questions in which I am interested. Is there a relationship between tutor or teacher retention and student retention? Do students participating in classes, on average, have retention rates different than those who participate in one-to-one tutoring? What happens to students when they leave the program? Do they go to other programs? How often do they return? How long do they stay away? How do the retention rates of open-entry open-exit programs compare with programs that use semester systems, and what does that suggest? Programs might develop their own questions about retention and use their investigations as a way to help them develop retention strategies and set policy. They should also think about how to best structure themselves to address reality: some students will always be coming and going.

Endnote

1 The study was funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, with funds from the U.S. Department of Education.

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Where Attendance is Not a Problem

Some thoughts on why ESOL students often persist despite considerable obstacles

Moira Lucey

According to a U.S. Department of Education national evaluation of federally-supported adult education programs completed in 1994, enrollment numbers and class sizes tend to be larger in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programs than in adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE) (Fitzgerald, 1995). In addition, students enrolled in ESOL classes receive an average of 113 hours of instruction before leaving a program, which is three to four times more hours of instruction than students leaving ABE or ASE get. As a result of the high level of participation in ESOL classes, the study found improved basic skills, literacy skill, and employability in learners.

Why are participation and retention rates higher in ESOL than in ABE or ASE classes? What motivates an adult to attend ESOL classes? I can only respond to these questions by first reflecting on our ESOL program at the International Institute of Boston and on my experience with ESOL learners.

As is typical in many adult education programs, at the International Institute of Boston we end each term with a ceremony. It is always the same. Students, teachers, and other staff fill a room. Brief speeches are made. Those students finishing our highest level class are handed diplomas. Those who got full time jobs but still come to class every day are applauded. Attendance certificates are handed out. As names are read, those who had perfect attendance rise. Then those who missed only one day stand. Those who will be returning next term sit in the audience looking pleased that they are able to come back. They come from many countries and backgrounds. They are all ages and sizes.

Each semester, year after year, I continue to be amazed as I address the group. I see students busily snapping pictures of the graduates, groups of friends, and teachers. I hear those students who are completing our highest level class approach their teachers, begging for permission to enroll class for just one more term. I look into the eyes of those who have full-time jobs but still manage to attend class 15 hours a week. I observe the groups of newly formed friends sitting together, laughing and sharing stories and food. I think of what it really takes for adults to embark on the process of learning a new language and literacy and what is at stake if they do not learn to function in English at some level. I marvel at the fact that the vast majority of these students have studied well beyond the national average of 113 hours of instruction before leaving our program. The main reason why students from our ESOL classes do not complete a term is most often job related; it's rarely related to motivation.

For ESOL students, improved English language and literacy skills are not the only reason for participating in a program. ESOL classes provide the key to understanding more about how to operate in American culture. They give students the opportunity not only to practice language but to learn why something is said or how language changes in a given cultural context. Students

learn what to say or not say on a job interview or how to make a doctor's appointment for a sick child. Students share experiences with each other. As they gain language skills and a better understanding of America, their ability to function more effectively in their communities, workplaces, and neighborhoods increases.

Having the freedom to attend school is a privilege for some learners, one that may not have been offered them in their native countries. Whether it is a young man denied entrance to college because of the political affiliations of his family or a woman who was never permitted to go to school because women in her country did not attend school, these students are determined to learn. This is their opportunity.

ESOL programs provide learners with a chance to interact with other adults who may have similar life experiences, come from the same country, or are facing the same challenges. Students, especially those who have recently come to the U.S., are often separated from friends and family. Class is a place to make new friends. The social isolation many ESOL learners feel because of their inability to communicate with neighbors or co-workers in English lessens as friendships form and networks develop.

Of the ESOL students surveyed in the U.S. Department of Education's national evaluation, 92 percent said that they read well or very well in their native languages. Half of the ESOL students had completed at least high school Unlike many of the students enrolled in ABE or General Educational Development (GED) classes, ESOL students have not necessarily had failure experiences prior to enrolling in a program. They may be well educated and speak more than one language. They enter programs with excitement. That, in turn, contributes to their ability to learn English. For most, studying ESOL carries no stigma: it is not looked at as remedial education. Even if ESOL students have little or no formal education in their native countries, we often see a high level of motivation to learn English and basic English literacy. In fact, these learners often stay in our ESOL classes for a year or more, attending regularly.

External factors can also influence students' participation in a program. Whether it is an employer who is recommending class attendance or a worker from the welfare department, expectations and requirements may, if met, result in a reward. For students on public assistance, it is cash and food stamps, medical assistance and child care. For students whose bosses have requested that they enroll in ESOL classes, it can be better positions or maintaining current jobs. Many students acknowledge the need to improve their English language and literacy skills for their jobs. That is why they come to class.

Certainly the quality of a program influences attendance and retention rates. Support services, especially bilingual support, allow programs to more effectively and comprehensively reach out to adult populations with needs that may go beyond education. Flexibility and options in scheduling allow students unable to continue in a daytime class, for example, to attend an evening class. The quality of the teaching staff is also critical. Massachusetts now has a number of masters-level ESOL teacher training programs producing well-trained teachers. This, combined with resources from the state allocated to training and professional development, helps us recruit and support talented teachers.

While many of our students show impressive attendance and retention rates, I do not want to ignore the fact that some students do not complete a semester.

As with all adult learners, our students have other roles and responsibilities. Some situations necessitate dropping out: lack of child care, health problems, a move to another area, and employer demands are the most common. Factors that relate to the program also cause learners to disappear. If the class schedule is inconvenient or the goal of the learner and the program differ, students may leave. But even if a learner drops out, the motivation to learn often remains in the form of an intent to continue studying when the time is right. It is this motivation and determination to learn that characterizes the adult ESOL learner, and it is also what keeps so many of us working in the field from "dropping out."

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About the Author

Currently working as Director of Programs at the International Institute of Boston, *Moira Lucey* has extensive experience in adult education. She has taught, planned, and administered both ESOL and literacy programs in the U.S. and abroad. She was one of the authors of the teacher handbook Preventive Mental Health in the ESL Classroom, and is currently involved in the development of a citizenship education program at the International Institute.

Getting into Groups

In Gilmer County, Georgia, a shift from individualized instruction to classes and group discussion increased student retention aned participation

by Michael Pritza

I am an instructor at the Gilmer County Adult Learning Center in Ellijay, Georgia. Gilmer county lies at the southern end of the Appalachian Mountains in the extreme north and central part of the state. Like many rural counties, Gilmer, once relatively isolated, is rapidly becoming a satellite community of a major urban area, in this case, Atlanta. Our students are a diverse group in terms of age and academic development; the youngest is 16, the oldest is 92. They range from non-readers to those who have completed the tests of General Educational Development (GED) and are studying for entrance to technical school or community college. With the exception of a dozen or so currently enrolled Hispanic students, all are Caucasians in the middle- to low-income brackets. Women outnumber men by about I've to one.

Like many others in the field of adult basic education, my colleague, Art LaChance, and I were concerned with student retention. Our drop out rate was consistently about 34 percent. About ten percent of these would enthusiastically enroll, but never return. A larger number began well but their attendance gradually tapered off until they finally disappeared without notice or explanation. A surprising number, perhaps another ten to 15 percent, were within easy reach of their goals when they suddenly and inexplicably left the program. Follow- up calls to these students did not yield results. We both felt personally and professionally frustrated by our apparent inability to keep these students engaged for the full course of the program. We knew that they were falling short of their goals, and we felt a lack of effectiveness as an organization. We wondered if we could do anything to change this pattern, or whether it was an unalterable fact of adult education. We had never looked at the problem critically, however, until we participated in a practitioner inquiry project sponsored by the University of Georgia's Department of Adult and Continuing Education in Athens. It was with this project that we really began to consider the possible causes for such high numbers of dropouts.

We began by brainstorming ideas about what we could do to increase retention. Would different methods of intake or the creation of a weekly student orientation affect retention rates? Would awards and certificates of level completion have an impact? What about asking our students about the kinds of study and activity they preferred? We wondered about creating regularly scheduled classes in reading, writing, or math, which we didn't have at the time, or starting discussion groups based on current events. We had success with some team building and discussion-prompting activities in the past, so this idea seemed to have merit.

We then considered our students. All of them were influenced by variables over which we had no control: problems with family, money, illness, transportation, child care, and the like. Many of them told us that they had never seen education as a necessity. Even in the face of recent industry lay offs or the inability to find work, many still saw education as irrelevant. "Why," they

asked, "do we have to know this stuff?"

As I mentioned, we had been offering individualized, self-paced study with instructor assistance and self-directed computer-based programs. We began to wonder whether these methods were contributing to our high attrition rate. Students had liked the few group activities we had led. Perhaps a more successful method would include greater participation from both students and instructors alike. This hunch began to take precedence over other ideas. We eliminated most of our other questions and focused on the issue of participation. Our research question became: Will group participation in structured classes and discussion groups increase student motivation and retention?

The first step in our investigation was straightforward. We asked our students to respond to a simple questionnaire about the possible instructional approaches we could use at the Center. Choices included individual study with either text materials or interactive computer programs such as PLATO (which we were already doing), study in pairs, or group study in a classroom environment. The groups would focus on language, math, and writing skills. More than 85 percent of about 50 students answered that they would prefer studying together as a group.

Student Input

We then interviewed students in more depth to determine at what point and in which subjects they felt they most needed help. We began to hold loosely organized classes two or three times a week based on the needs of the greatest number of students. We included students at all levels and left attendance to their discretion, rather than making it mandatory. Since we have two instructors, one of us was always available to those students who preferred to work individually. Classes were at first informal and unscheduled. We would simply move around the Center and ask "Who wants to do class?" and get together for an hour or so, creating a lesson from whatever students were working on at the time. As we progressed, the classes became more structured and scheduled, though during the span of the project we were careful not to make these sessions seem unnecessarily academic or authoritarian. We did not want to re-stimulate negative past experiences, and we considered student feedback and participation to be two of the most important elements. We also began discussion groups based on topics selected by the students and on exercises from "Beyond Basic Skills," a newsletter of classroom ideas published by the University of Georgia. These groups provided a place in which the students could talk about issues they felt were relevant to their lives, like work and personal finance. In these forums, they questioned the relevance of education, asking "How is education going to improve the quality of my life?" and "How can my life improve by learning percents and geometry?"

Hard Questions

Sometimes answering these questions was hard. During our project, I kept a log of my observations and reflections. The log entries seem to be most useful in shedding light on recurrent themes about student needs and observations. In reviewing the log entries, I discovered the importance of making material relevant to students' lives. "Today," I wrote in my log, "Linda and Troy [names have been changed] asked why they have to learn this stuff. Can we make more money?' If I say No, but your quality of life will improve,' they ask really hard questions: How would my life improve without more money?' There seem to be

very few students who will buy the academic reasoning."

As part of our inquiry project, we turned to attendance records for data, extracting the cumulative monthly hours of all students who were not mandated to attend and comparing them to hours of attendance in the months before the project began. The data are displayed in Figures 1 and 2, found on page 22. We were struck by the fact that the average number of attendance hours for non-mandated students had increased about 50 percent during the project. At first we were skeptical about such a large increase, but a review of attendance records showed the data to be correct.

Art and I interpret this data to be an indication of the success of our project, and because of this we have incorporated group classes and discussion into our present methods of instruction and curriculum presentation with some real success. Classes are full and students actually make time to include them in their daily schedules. Both the classes and the discussion groups generate energy and enthusiasm in the students, which leads to greater participation and time spent in the program. Participation, especially in the discussion groups, is open to all students, making the classes multi-level. This exposes many of the learners to ideas and subject matter that they would not otherwise encounter and fosters student interaction. It seems to spark in some of our beginning ABE students a desire to participate further: they say they feel good about "going to class." We have noticed that class participation seems to foster study groups, with more advanced students often helping those who are less far along. Because of this, students actually seem to be spending more time involved in their studies.

Of course, this study also created some new problems and challenges. We need to recognize that many factors which influence motivation and retention are probably beyond our influence, and so concentrate on those that we feel we can help to change. As instructors, we realize that we should constantly remain open to change and to restructuring our methods of approach according to the needs of the students, both as a group and as individuals. What works one time, with one group, may not necessarily work the next. Certain constants, such as the need for relevant content, may be extrapolated from our daily work, but the solutions to the problems we encounter may vary from time to time and group to group. This has led us to believe that there is no single solution to the problems of retention and motivation, but many solutions must be applied according to the demands of the time and the needs of the students.

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About the Author

Michael Pritza began work in adult literacy as a volunteer with the Gilmer County Reading Program in 1992. In 1993, he accepted a position with the program, where he now serves as an ABE/GED instructor. Pritza has been involved in practitioner inquiry research since 1995, and is currently working on a degree in Alternatives in Education from Skidmore College in New York.

Learner Motivation

"We're trying to get a picture of the complex set of obstacles and supports that students have as they attempt to persist in a program," explains Dr. John Comings, the director of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) and principal investigator of the NCSALL study on learner motivation. "We will use that information to design an intervention that we think will help students persist, and then test out the efficacy of that intervention using traditional experimental research methods."

NCSALL has embarked on a multi-phase research process involving innovative and traditional qualitative research and traditional quantitative research techniques to better understand learner motivation and apply that knowledge to the classroom. The non-traditional aspects of the project grew out of research assistant Andrea Parrella's teaching experience. Her students had trouble answering in-depth questions "cold." They needed a chance to reflect before they could produce substantive answers. She felt that the same might be true for participants in this study, so the research team designed an activity that involves potential research study participants in exploring a topic similar to the research topic to "warm them up" before the research interview. By participating in this activity, research participants also get some exposure to the interview team, and are thus more comfortable talking with them during the interviews.

Comings and his team weighed the value of doing this activity as part of their research. "There's a fine line between leading participants and helping them to think more deeply about the question," he says. They wanted to be sure they would have a rich set of responses, and built in checks and balances to ensure that they would be getting valid data.

This activity is only one small part of the project. Following the activity, Parrella and research assistant Chaunda Scott conduct 30-minute one-on-one interviews; they are planning to do a total of 200 at 18 sites around New England. During the interviews, they ask learners to discuss the forces acting upon them three times, in three different ways, to ensure that they are getting an accurate picture. They will return four months later and re-interview the participants to see if the supports they have and obstacles they face have changed.

The research team will use this data to give them a picture of the major forces acting for and against learner persistence. They will then design a classroom activity or set of activities that they feel will help learners to understand these forces and balance them. This activity will be tested using a traditional experimental control model with random assignment. In other words, students will be randomly assigned to classes that use the same curriculum; the main difference between the classes is that in some the teacher will use the motivation-enhancing activity and in others -- the control groups -- the teacher won't. The persistence of the two sets of learners will be compared. By using this design, the effect -- which the researchers hope will be stronger motivation -- can be attributed to the intervention rather than some other variable.

Researchers take into account substantive and financial issues when choosing a sample upon which to focus. This team is looking at adult basic education learners who have reading levels on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) that fall between grades five and eight. They chose this level because they felt that students reading below it may have different motivational issues that relate to learning disabilities. General Educational Development (GED) students were eliminated because many would have completed their tests and graduated before the research team did follow up interviews, creating logistical problems. The team did not include English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students because of limited resources: in this type of study, ESOL students should be interviewed in their native languages, an expensive prospect. The sample includes learners who range from the age of 16 to 70, it's divided about evenly between men and women, and the learners are white, black, Latino, Portuguese, and Haitian. Learners come from both rural and urban programs.

For more on this study, contact Andrea Parrella at Harvard Graduate School of Education, NCSALL, Nichols House, Cambridge, MA 02138-3572; phone: (617) 495-1712; and e-mail: parrelan@hugse1.harvard.edu.

-- by Barbara Garner

BLACKBOARD

Suggested Readings:

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Focus on Basics

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The GED: Whom Does It Help?

Results from a new approach to studying the economic benefits of the GED

by John H. Tyler

Does acquiring the GED increase the earnings of drop outs? At least 13 different studies in the last decade have examined aspects of this question. Not one of these studies, however, was really able to separate the impact of the credential from the contributions that unobservable factors inherent in GED holders, such as motivation, might make. A quirk of policy enabled me and my colleagues at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Richard J. Murnane and John B. Willett, to develop a unique approach to looking at this question. Our results differ considerably from those of our colleagues. We found that, unlike almost all previous studies, at least for young white drop outs, acquisition of a credential of General Educational Development (GED) can have a substantial impact on earnings.

Continued on page 3

Focus on Basics is the quarterly publication of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. It presents best practices, current research on adult learning and literacy, and how research is used by adult basic education teachers, counselors, program administrators, and policymakers. *Focus on Basics* is dedicated to connecting research with practice, to connecting teachers with research and researchers with the reality of the classroom, and by doing so, making adult basic education research more relevant to the field.

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WORLD EDUCATION

Welcome to *Focus on Basics*

Dear Readers,

Since September, 1997, researchers affiliated with the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) have been conducting studies on a variety of topics of concern to the field of adult literacy. I have described some of them in the column *Focus on Research*, which appears in each issue. The first results are now ready for the public.

In our cover article, John Tyler presents his research on the economic impact of the General Educational Development (GED) credential. Using a methodology new to GED-impact research, Tyler and his colleagues find that the GED has a substantial economic impact for young white GED holders whose scores hover near the passing line on the tests. That impact is not found for nonwhites. These findings are both encouraging and troubling.

Tyler has also been examining the process of passing the GED. Who passes the first time? How do pass rates change because of the retest option? Which tests are the biggest barriers to passing, and does that vary by gender or race? Tyler's preliminary findings are on page 22.

Thanks to this research, we know more about the patterns of who passes the GED and what impact it has on income. How do people prepare students for the tests? Anson Green, Jamie Barron Jones, and Cynthia Zengler share with us processes they went through to develop intake and instructional strategies that work.

The GED is a widely recognized credential, but many people outside of the field of adult literacy do not know that it is offered in French and Spanish as well as English. Anastasia Cotton and Bertha Cantú-Luján provide us with a look at the Spanish GED program in Doña Ana County, New Mexico.

As you teach the GED, or pre-GED, or English for speakers of other languages, do you use materials drawn from the lives of your students, or do you have a favorite text that works for you? Do the learners in your program help set program policy and determine curriculum and materials? NCSALL researchers Victoria Purcell-Gates, Sophie Degener, and Erik Jacobson have developed a 'map' of practices along these two dimensions: the degree of relevance to the lives of learners of materials, and the degree of participation in class and program decision making held by learners. A report on their work begins on page 11.

We urge you to consider the research findings and their application to practice that we have presented in this issue. Contact us with your thoughts on the instructional and policy implications they raise.

On a different note, we were greatly saddened to learn that Michael Pritza, an ABE/GED instructor in the Gilmer Country Reading Program, Ellijay, Georgia, passed away on April 26th. Michael wrote about his experiences shifting from individualized instruction to classes and group discussion in the last issue of *Focus on Basics*. His contributions to the field and to his program are valued; he will be missed.

Sincerely,

Barbara Garner

Barbara Garner
Editor

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The GED... *continued from page 1*

Previous research into the economic benefits of the GED points to relatively inconsequential increases in hourly wages, annual earnings, or employment for GED holders relative to drop outs without a GED. In contrast, our study shows that young white GED holders receive a large boost in annual earnings if they acquire a GED. Our treatment group was drop outs age 16 to 21 who passed the GED with scores that were at or just above passing: what could be described as on the margin of passing. Our comparison group was drop outs age 16 to 21 who had the same marginal scores on the GED but, because of different passing requirements in their states, did not receive the credential. When we compare our treatment and comparison groups, we find that the annual earnings of the white treatment group of GED holders, five years after they received the credential, are ten to 20 percent higher than the annual earnings of the comparison group of drop outs who do not possess a GED. This is a very large percentage increase, but it represents an increase in annual earnings of only about $1,500, leaving the clear message that the GED cannot be counted upon as a sole ticket out of poverty.

We were able to conduct separate analyses for white and nonwhite drop outs, and we find no statistically significant differences between the annual earnings of the treatment and comparison groups of nonwhite drop outs. I will discuss this rather surprising and distressing finding later and offer possible explanations.

Different Methodology

As I stated above, these findings come from a study that uses a different methodology than has previously been employed in GED-related research. GED holders are a self-selected, rather than random, group. Given this, failure to account for factors that may cause some drop outs to pursue a GED while other, seemingly similar, drop outs do not results in estimates biased away from the truth. For example, if it is the most motivated drop outs who tend to pursue the GED, then failure to account for this will overstate the effect of the GED on drop outs. Our methodology accounts for this self-selection bias by starting with a data set of drop outs who have all chosen to attempt a GED. We then use the fact that different states have different GED passing standards to compare drop outs who have the same GED exam scores, but who do or do not have a GED depending on the state in which they attempted the exams.

NCSALL Research FINDINGS

With this methodology, our treatment group — individuals with a GED — is composed of drop outs who are on the margin of passing, but have a GED because they are in a state with a lower passing standard. Meanwhile, our comparison group — individuals without a GED — is composed of drop outs who are on the margin of passing, but who do not have a GED because they are in a state with a higher passing standard. We are able to account for the fact that our treatment and comparison individuals come from different states and these states may have different labor markets, cost of living, etc.

Data

The data we used to conduct this study are also unique to GED-related research. Past research relied on data sets such as High School and Beyond or the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, which do not have details on GED scores or attempts at passing. Our data were supplied by the GED Testing Service and the state Education Departments in Connecticut, New York, and Florida. These data contain basic demographic information and — critical to our methodology — GED test scores for drop outs who were age 16 to 21 in 1990, the year they last attempted the GED exams. We have data from most, but not all, states on these 1990 GED candidates. Notice that everyone in our data, passers as well as non-passers, has 'selected' themselves into the pool of drop outs who would like to have a GED, as indicated by the fact that they attempted the battery of GED exams. To obtain an outcome measure, we worked with programmers at the Social Security Administration (SSA) to merge these GED data with SSA annual earnings data, yielding a data set containing basic demographic information (including states where the GED was attempted), GED test scores, and annual Social Security-taxable earnings. To allow the GED time to take effect in the labor market, we measure annual earnings in 1995, five years after our sample last attempted the GED.

Interpretation

Understanding the mechanisms through which a GED might have an

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impact on the earnings of drop outs is necessary to interpret our results properly. There are three.

- If preparation for the GED tests tends to increase cognitive skills, and if we assume that higher levels of cognitive skills lead to increased earnings, then there is a 'human capital component' to the GED.
- Many post-secondary education and training programs are denied to uncredentialed drop outs, but open to GED holders. To the extent that post-secondary education and training lead to increased earnings, then the GED's function as a 'gateway' to these programs would result in higher earnings for GED holders.
- Gaining information about the future productivity potential of job applicants can be a difficult and expensive enterprise. Employers may value the GED as a signal of unobservable or costly to observe productive attributes. If so, then drop outs who use the GED to 'signal' higher levels of motivation, maturity, commitment to work, or other productive attributes would tend to have higher earnings than drop outs who lacked the signal.

As a result of our research design, our estimates measure only the value of the GED as a labor market signal. Two factors lead us to this conclusion. First, since our treatment and comparison groups have the same GED test scores, the two groups are balanced on the human capital dimension: on average, the treatment and comparison groups have the same skill levels as measured by the GED exams. Thus, any observed differences in earnings cannot be the result of differences in underlying skills of the two groups; hence, there is no human capital component in our estimates of the effect of the GED on earnings.

Second, since other research we have conducted indicates that the lowest scoring GED holders — those who make up our GED treatment group — acquire very little post-secondary education or training, our estimates have essentially no gateway component. This leaves only labor market signaling as an explanation for the earnings differences we find between GED holders and uncredentialed drop outs. Thus, our results are correctly interpreted as the labor market signaling effect of the GED on the earnings of young drop outs who choose to acquire a GED and whose skills place them on the margins of passing.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations that result from SSA confidentiality requirements and the methodology we employ. As a result of federal guidelines designed to protect the confidentiality of individuals, the data released to us by the SSA impose three constraints on our study. First, we have to group all individuals who are not white into a single category, thus destroying the ability to examine whether the GED affects the earnings of African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and other minority groups differently. We can only speak to the overall average effect of the GED on this nonwhite group. Second, we cannot explore potential gender differences in the effects of the GED on earnings. And third, we cannot examine the impact of the GED for older GED holders. In future work, using different data, we will be able to retain our methodology and explore these important racial-ethnic and gender issues.

Our methodology, which allows us to address heretofore intractable selectivity-bias issues, also imposes some limitations on what we can say. As a direct result of our methodology, we can do no more than speculate about the following questions that are important to a better understanding of how the GED works in the labor market:

- How large are the average human capital or gateway components of the GED?
- What is the effect of the GED on the earnings of the random drop out, a sample that includes drop outs who would never voluntarily select into the GED pool?
- What is the effect of the GED on higher scoring GED holders?

While it is important to point out the limitations to this study, a discussion of what we cannot say should not overshadow what we can say with this research. Namely, that we have very credible findings indicating that, at least for young white drop outs, there is a substantial payoff for individuals who chose to pursue acquiring a GED in 1990 and whose skills place them on the margin of passing.

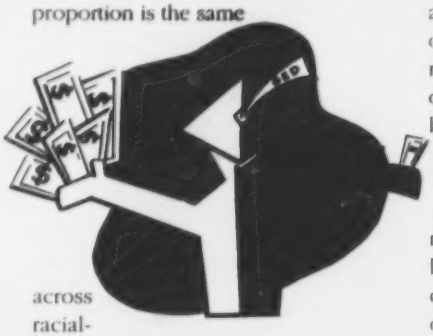
Exploring Results

Given the interpretation of our results, we have to ask why employers would appear to value the GED as a signal of productive attributes for young, relatively low-skilled white drop outs, but not value it as a signal of the potential productivity of similar nonwhite drop outs? One possible answer to this question is that for young nonwhite drop outs, employers may place a higher value on other signals, such as language or residential address, than on the GED signal. To be explicit, consider this hypothetical situation. Two young, nonwhite drop outs apply for the same entry level job. One has a GED, the other does not. All things observable to the employer being equal, we might expect the GED-holder to have an edge. In this example, however, I assume that all things are not equal. The GED-holder in this hypothetical situation speaks English as a second language (this is observable to the employer), and as a result the employer gives the job to the uncredentialed native speaker. This type of behavior on the part of

employers could lead to the results we find. A parallel example would adhere for residential address.

Another (and not mutually exclusive) explanation for our different white / nonwhite results contrasts the signaling effect of the credential for two different 'types' of GED holders. According to this hypothesis, some individuals actively seek to obtain a GED to convey a level of maturity or commitment to work, and some GED holders tend to acquire the credential primarily as a 'quasicompulsory' part of some larger program such as Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) training programs, or Job Corps activities. It may be that the GED conveys very different information when garnered in these two different ways, with employers discounting the 'GED signal' when it is coupled with public assistance programs. If this hypothesis were true, and if substantially more nonwhite than white GED holders obtained their credential in a quasi-compulsory manner, then this could explain our results. Our best estimates for the percentage of 1990-minted GED holders who may have acquired their credential in conjunction with a public assistance program are 44 percent for nonwhites and only 11 percent for whites. While these numbers do not prove the hypothesis, they at least work in a direction that lends credence to this explanation.

Finally, other work we have done suggests a third explanation (see page 22). Using data on GED candidates from Connecticut and Florida, we find that a substantially larger proportion of young white GED candidates pass on the first attempt than do African-American or Hispanic candidates. In these data, about 75 percent of white drop outs pass on the first attempt, while only about 60 percent of the Hispanic and 45 percent of the African-American candidates passed on the first attempt. We also find that regardless of race-ethnicity, about the same percentage of first-time failers attempt a second or third time. If we believe that some unknown proportion of these multiple-attempters would pass as the result of chance high scores, and that this proportion is the same



across racial-ethnic groups, then the result would be a higher proportion of nonwhite candidates who have a GED as a result of chance, relative to white drop outs. Furthermore, it is logical that most of these 'false positive' GED holders (drop outs who have a GED as a result of chance high scores) have scores that place them in the 'margin-of-passing' zone that we use to construct our treatment and comparison groups. Under this scenario, it is plausible that over time employers might tend to discount the signaling value of the GED for nonwhites whose skills are relatively low, which could explain the white-nonwhite differences we find in the data.

'My' Reality

A logical question is: How do these results fit my experience? The important point to keep in mind is that any one person's particular experiences would only represent a tiny fraction of our data. That is, our estimates represent the average impact of the GED over the nation. This average could represent a world where the impact of the GED is about the same for everyone in the sample; it could represent a world where half of the individuals in the sample get a big boost out of the GED, while the other half get virtually no benefit; or, it could represent a world where there is a complete range of impacts associated with GED attainment. We can only present the average effect for young white drop outs and the average effect for young nonwhite drop outs. As a result, any one piece of anecdotal evidence as to how the GED works in someone's community may or may not fit the story that our estimates present. This is the limitation of quantitative research: we cannot say what will happen to any one individual. This compares to the limitation of qualitative research, which is the inability to generalize findings to the population of interest. Thus, each type of research has its own strengths and weaknesses. Ideally, both types of research are used to inform policy and practice, keeping in mind what each can and cannot say.

Policy Implications

Our research finds that employers value and use the GED as a signal of skills and attitudes they consider to be important in jobs. The message for policy here is that, at least for young white drop outs, the GED is serving an important function for both employers and drop outs. It is a relatively easily accessible and inexpensive way for drop outs with certain attributes to signal to employers that they are a good employment risk. Put another way, in the absence of more complete information, using the GED as a signal is a cost-effective way for employers to chose among drop out job applicants. The puzzling lack of a signaling effect we find for young nonwhite GED holders is a critical question. We cannot provide further answers to this question with our current data, but we are already

working to secure more appropriate data that will be used to address this line of inquiry.

Even for white drop outs, however, the elements of good news contained in our findings must be leavened with the fact that the large percentage effects we find translate into relatively small real earnings gains of only $1,500 per year. Young GED holders have very low average annual earnings to start with, and so a $1,500 per year increase appears as a large percentage gain. Thus, we should remember that while the GED can lead to important earnings gains, by itself the credential is not a route out of poverty.

About the Author

John H. Tyler is Assistant Professor of Education, Economics, and Public Policy at Brown University. He completed this work for NCSALL while finishing his doctorate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Tyler taught middle school mathematics for eight years.

Full Report Available

The research report upon which this article is based is available from NCSALL for $10. To order, write to NCSALL *Reports*, World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210-1211; or e-mail NCSALL@WorldEd.org.

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Project-Based Learning and the GED

by Anson M. Green

A few years ago, I was hired to teach a General Educational Development (GED) class for public assistance recipients in San Antonio, Texas. I had been teaching Western humanities classes to freshmen and sophomores at Florida State University and had no training in teaching under-prepared adults. Though I could tell that the multilevel nature of the class would make the lecture approach I used in the university unworkable, I was most comfortable with a teacher-centered classroom. I adopted an approach where students silently studied individual subjects of the GED test using commercial GED textbooks, and I provided individual instruction.

This was somewhat successful in moving high-level students through the GED, yet I felt stymied in my efforts to motivate and educate those who required more remediation. Months of diligent work writing essays from GED textbook prompts or studying a science book often left them frustrated. In addition, I felt that most students who left class, with or without their GEDs, still lacked the self-esteem, motivation, and teamwork skills needed to get off public assistance and enter the workforce.

My frustration was relieved when I was introduced to the Project FORWARD life skills curriculum from El Paso Community College.[1] The curriculum stresses reading and writing activities that foster confidence and motivation by encouraging students to work together toward their academic and life goals. My quiet classroom began to give way to an excited, open community of learners. By connecting class activities to my students' world — a world where poverty, domestic violence, abuse, and brushes with the law are a commonality — I was able to increase their motivation to learn. Though their ages, educational backgrounds, and race varied, their shared experiences became the basis for instruction.

In September, 1996, Project FORWARD invited me to join a cadre of adult education teachers to explore innovative teaching techniques. A major objective was to implement a student project in our class. Though class projects seemed like an exciting idea, I never thought that they could be a viable means of producing the more defined skills needed to pass GED tests. Our initial meeting with Project FORWARD Director Barbara J. Baird and education consultant Heide Spruck Wrigley was spent defining the theory and discussing methods of implementation.[2] While the approach seemed exciting, I had reservations about how a project could be tied to the GED competencies and how my students, who are often very 'test driven,' would react to the idea.

Our First Project

Students in my open-entry class must attend class 25 hours a week to receive their welfare benefits, thus

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we provide five hours of instruction per day, five days a week. As 'test-driven' as my students can be, they rarely studied for their GED tests five hours a day. After some diligent work in the morning, they were usually less productive in the afternoons and turned to reading magazines, chatting, and even sleeping if they had spent a long night up with a sick child. When I undertook this new teaching initiative for Project FORWARD, I was hoping that we could make the afternoons more productive by using them for project time.

Much to my surprise, my class was very excited when I introduced the idea of spending our afternoons working on a project. I think part of my success in turning them from more traditional work lay in the way I introduced the idea. Rather than telling the class we were going to do projects in the afternoon, I asked them if they had any ideas that might improve the class and add some spice to our usually slow afternoons. I briefly mentioned the idea of working on a class project and at the same time passed around a book of student poems compiled by another class. All but two of my 20 students were interested, and ideas on what we could do began to emerge.

That year, my class produced a handbook for students designed to help new learners on public assistance feel more comfortable coming back to school. The idea came from two new students who suggested we make a one-stop resource outlining Aid to Families with Dependent Children / Job Opportunity and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) requirements and containing information on the GED test.[5]

The project was a great success for all: students excitedly compiled a useful handbook, and I was pleased by the amount of quality essay writing and editing skills gained in the process. Students edited each others' work and commented that they enjoyed debating and arguing over points of grammar rather than using worksheets to gain the knowledge. Since the handbook was designed for and by JOBS students, the class really began to grow as a community. Students realized that they had common hardships and concerns; new friendships developed, and students enjoyed working together to solve new problems. When we turned from the project to more traditional GED work, I sensed new motivation and excitement in the classroom.

When we finally received the bound copies of our student handbook after a brief summer break, only two students remained in our open-entry open-exit class who had been involved in creating it. The booklets made a strong impression on the new students, and they became eager to "one up" the previous class. I was pleased by the motivation and had high hopes for our next project.

This Year's Project

This year, my class took on a project that moved them from enriching their environment in the classroom to reaching out and becoming actively engaged in their community: a tall order, but one that evolved naturally within the class.

Last September, one student, Jennifer, suggested that our class give younger students advice on the dangers of dropping out of school. Dropping out and the unexpected pregnancy that often preceded it were experiences that most of my students had in common. I saw a perfect opportunity to develop a powerful project. The potential for building self-esteem, teamwork, and communication skills seemed limitless; plus, the project would demand many academic skills. Unfortunately, only about five of my 16 students seemed really interested. They persisted, however, and, as ideas began to come together, more and more students began to provide input.

On the suggestion of Jennifer's case manager, we found a contact at a local junior high school who was a counselor. The counselor came to hear my students' intentions and left very interested in hosting our presentation. The meeting was a true watershed. My class began to truly see the potential for the project. A counselor, who, when my students had been in high school, might have been a figure to be avoided, was now inviting them to use their experiences as a positive teaching tool for others. Two of my students had dropped out of this same school, making the significance of the project even more profound.

"Students realized that they had common hardships and concerns; new friendships developed, and students enjoyed working together to solve new problems."

In class, we spent anywhere from 20 minutes to a few hours a day working on the details of the project; the remainder of the class time was spent focused on specific GED work. Some days, when attendance was

A Student's Story
by Linda Yzaguirre

The biggest mistake I ever made was dropping out of school. I thought going out and working were more important, but all I got by dropping out was working minimum wage jobs, hanging out with gangs, and eventually getting arrested. I spent time in jail and am currently serving a ten year probation sentence.

I decided to do our "Something to Think About" presentation because I thought that if young students heard my story and all the mistakes I made, they might think about what they are doing now and how it will effect them later. I never did.

In our presentation, I wanted to stress how important it is to graduate and go to college. A high school diploma is no longer enough to get a good job. I feel better knowing that maybe I helped someone from making the same mistakes I made. Maybe by hearing my life story, they will decide that they don't want to take the same road I did.

Since doing the presentation, I now have more confidence in myself. I'm now in junior college and feel like I can do anything I put my mind to.

About the Author

Linda Yzaguirre was a student of the Culebra Road JOBS class in 1997 and is currently attending San Antonio College, where she is studying computer programming. When she's not in school, she likes to spend time with her son Brandon.

poor or students felt a pressing need to cram for the GED tests, we did not work on the project at all. We assigned several students to be in charge of particular sections of the project so that when someone was absent or left the class, progress on that section could continue. We kept an informal list of who was working on what and found it to be a successful way to manage the work.

The project seemed to be well underway when we ran into a glitch that brought it to a halt. Before Thanksgiving break we received a phone message confirming that we had approval to do a presentation, but that the topic of pregnancy could not be brought up. I tried to contact the counselor for clarification, but was told she was already out of her office for the break.

Even though my students range in age from their late teens to mid-30s, early pregnancy had been a major contributor to all of their loss of education and opportunity. If they could not candidly advise students on this point, how could they truly feel like they were making a difference? Despondent, we left for Thanksgiving break. The next week our class resumed, and, as I expected, work on the project ceased. My students had lost the impetus to continue.

Fortunately, I reached the counselor the following week and received some encouraging news. The controversy lay in the way we treated the subject of pregnancy. As long as the topic remained in the personal stories of my students, it was acceptable. We were, however, not allowed to direct questions to the students that pertained to premarital sex or contraception. Though it was an added challenge, the stipulation allowed me to involve the class in a very real critical analysis of a subject that is still controversial in the South.

After several more weeks of dedicated rehearsal, my class delivered a series of presentations to students at the Anson Jones Middle School. Our presentations, entitled "Something to Think About," focused on the extreme hardships and almost insurmountable obstacles my students faced after dropping out of school. They included a question and answer session on the realities of dropping out of school, a budgeting game that emphasized the impossibility of making it on minimum wage with no diploma, and concluded with personal testimony from my students.

The presentations were a great success. My students were congratulated by counselors,

teachers, and, most importantly, the middle school students themselves. Imagine a scene where 70 12 to 14 year old boys, many of whom are heading for gangs, are struck silent by a tale of abuse, alienation, and abandonment told by a young woman only a few years older than themselves. My class had made a significant impression on a usually impenetrable group.

Following the presentations, my students were overflowing with confidence and actively critiqued their performance, while discussing what they wanted to do next time. They demanded we schedule more presentations at other schools. The few students who had preferred to be backstage participants, facilitating the presentation, suddenly gained the

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confidence to volunteer their stories.

My class worked like never before toward perfection, probably because they were addressing issues in which they were the experts. They also recognized the need to connect successfully with the students. In a sense, they were creating their own curriculum to teach others. As they wrote their autobiographies, rehearsed them in front of a borrowed video camera, and rewrote them again and again, they developed the critical analysis and writing skills needed for the GED essay test. They were writing about their lives, so they went at it with a passion that a textbook or exam could never inspire.

While creating the budgeting game, students gained solid math skills in truly contextual learning. What started out to be a simple process of adding and subtracting paychecks and debts became a lengthy lesson in finance supplemented with GED textbook work in percentages and decimals. Real-life problem solving entered the class: What exactly was the F.I.C.A. tax, and how do we figure it? What are fixed and flexible payments? Is cable TV really a necessity? They debated what to include and how to figure costs, figuring and re-figuring until a consensus was found and the presentation planned.

Besides academic remediation, my students started gaining the self-esteem, motivation, and group interaction skills necessary for success in the workplace. Pat, a mother of four, successfully entered a highly competitive air conditioning and heating program taught by Texas A & M University just days after our presentations. Though very motivated on her own, Pat commented that working on the project helped boost her confidence, making the transition to a completely male vocational classroom less daunting. Now, several months later and still the only woman in the program, Pat has been appointed shop foreman over 28 men in her class. Accomplishments like this are truly tangible examples of the intrinsic qualities gained from project work. Relying solely on the GED to ensure success is not realistic. A strong sense of personal responsibility, a solid self-image, and good interpersonal skills are a vital addition to the credential. By working as a team, my students were able to turn past mistakes into a positive learning experience for themselves and others [4].

This project was ambitious; however, implementing project-based activities in class need not be so intensive. Students find it easy to write about their families. Using inexpensive three-ring binders and photographs from home, students can create and compile autobiographies. Writing comes more easily and students gain the marketable skills of editing, laying out, and organizing a text that is their own. Pooling the diversity of the class into a peer-edited cookbook, a collection of student autobiographies, or a letter to the local transit authority to request better bus service to your program can provide a rich forum for building a tight community in the classroom, in addition to working on skills needed for the GED.

The Teacher's Role

Project-based learning allows students to become actively engaged in their learning experience. The instructor takes a back seat while students initiate, facilitate, evaluate, and produce a project that has meaning to them. Instead of creating and directing exercises for passive students, instructors become coaches, facilitators, and sounding boards for student ideas. As a teacher, I constantly listen for issues that really engage the class. This

A Student's Story
by Margarita Roman

Participating in this presentation has made me become a better person in school. It has also helped me speed up in all skills.

The presentation I did with the group was progress for myself and also helped others. I participated by letting students know how difficult it was for me since dropping out of school. It was not a good decision.

My story was part of my life. I advised students on the importance of staying in school. I shared my education and how I've progressed in the past year. I shared how I've managed 12 years of my life raising my three kids with the help of the government, which won't be there for me much longer. I spoke on how I've budgeted my assistance through the month with three kids. I also shared what it's like returning to school and beginning learning again, building up new skills, and also building up self-esteem and positive attitudes towards education.

The presentation was very interesting. Our group had all the attention of the students. It felt great having so much attention. Also our group had a lot of questions from the students at Anson Jones Middle School. I feel like it was very successful.

About the Author

Margarita Roman is a 28-year-old single mother. She likes to spend lots of time with her three kids, Ernest Jr., Alfonso, and Concepcion Margarita Diaz. She enjoys eating out on weekends and going out to recreation parks. She also enjoys helping her kids with their homework, which has helped them improve in the second nine weeks of school, and they also have perfect attendance. She enjoys reading books with them.

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conscious listening helps me identify key issues that are important to my students. I then use these issues as catalysts for student activities or projects. [5] Rather than trying to teach students how to be critical thinkers by providing readings and writing samples on the Louisiana Purchase or cellular mitosis from GED textbooks, I take themes that are important to them and help them create activities that develop strong thinking and language skills. Since the focus is relevant, learning becomes natural, unforced, and engaging. Students work, not simply to pass a test but to create change or add refined meaning to their lives.

This approach means I had to look at my classroom in a different light. When I began teaching, I saw talking, interaction, and commotion in the class due to outside issues as deviation from learning. I felt safe with teacher-guided activities that produced quiet, individualized learning. Channeling students' energy and concerns into a quiet classroom was often difficult. Now, I capitalize on this energy and information and use it as raw material for student work. Furthermore, students who once expected straightforward test preparation, but usually dreaded it, find the open, participatory environment more conducive to learning. Students who had difficulty writing half a page on a regular GED topic were amazed to find themselves writing four or five pages of analysis on their own lives for our project. Math work, which often seemed oppressive, was eagerly tackled for our project because it truly seemed relevant.

I feel that much of the success of project-based learning activities rests on the creation of a comfortable, risk-free classroom environment. Students must feel they can discuss their lives, beliefs, and mistakes without fear of criticism or judgment. Only then can the instructor locate real issues of importance to build on in class. For the instructor, the challenges lie not so much in carrying out the actual project but in being able to assume effectively the role of mentor and coach rather than dispenser of solutions. Being actively involved in the salient issues of the class and then teasing out what is evocative and meaningful to the students is crucial. Distilling these into a class project, though, usually takes care of itself. Students are experts in their own reality; the biggest challenge is letting them guide you through it.

Endnotes

[1] Project FORWARD is an 80-lesson life skills curriculum funded through a special projects grant from the Texas Education Agency. For information on obtaining the curriculum on disk, contact The Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning Clearinghouse at 1-(800)-441-7323.

[2] See chapter two of Heide Spruck Wrigley and Gloria Guth's *Bringing Literacy To Life Issues and Options in Adult ESL Literacy* (San Diego: Dominie Press Inc., 1992) for a thorough account of a variety of classroom approaches that emphasize student participation and meaningful learning. Elsa Roberts Auerbach's *Making Meaning, Making Change* (McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems Inc., 1992) is also indispensable on these points.

[3] This student project, "RULER," accompanied by a "How To" guide, is available through The Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning Clearinghouse at 1-(800)-441-7323.

[4] The project, "Something to Think About," has been published on the Internet at http://members.aol.com/CulebraMom/jrhigh.html. Print copies are available from The Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning Clearinghouse at 1-(800)-441-7323.

[5] Auerbach (note 2), page 43. Chapter four of this book, "Ways In: Finding Student Themes," provides some useful tips on identifying issues important to your students.

About the Author

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About the Artist

Cindy Barrientes, a 25-year-old mother of two, attends GED classes on Culebra Road. After getting her GED, she plans to attend San Antonio College to become an occupational therapist. In her spare time, she likes to get on her treadmill and work up a sweat.

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Issue B: June 1998

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NCSALL Research FINDINGS

Describing Program Practice: A Typology Across Two Dimensions

by Barbara Garner

Of the adult literacy programs participating in a recent NCSALL study, 73 percent can be described as using activities and materials that are not related to their students' lives and as teacher directed and controlled rather than collaborative. The purpose of the study was to create a typology of adult literacy programs across the United States that describes the distribution of programs along those two dimensions — relevance of materials and control of decisions — and not to test the efficacy of different types of programs, explain researchers Victoria Purcell-Gates, Sophie Degener, and Erik Jacobson, of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The researchers hope that this information will be helpful to those who may hold preconceived ideas about how widespread certain practices are, or about the scope of the challenge if they are concerned with changing the status quo. Furthermore, for policy makers, funders, and others concerned with program outcomes, this study provides information regarding the variety in the nature of adult literacy programs. At the very least, according to the researchers, this study provides a data-based description of the array of adult literacy program models currently operating.

Adult literacy programs can be typed along a number of relevant dimensions, and Purcell-Gates, Degener, and Jacobson make no claim that those they chose for this typology are the only, the most relevant, or even the most important dimensions that could be used. They looked at two dimensions of instruction — contextualized / decontextualized and dialogic / monologic — because of their interest in the possible relationships between these dimensions of adult literacy instruction and increased use of print in the actual lives of participants over time. The first dimension describes how much program content and materials reflect the specific needs and sociocultural context of the learner with regards to real-life literacy functions. In other words, how relevant are the content and materials to the learners' lives? The second dimension reflects how involved the learner is in decision making with regards to the activities of the classroom and programs.

Life-Contextual / Decontextual

The authors justify examining this dimension by citing theorists who claim that the distinction between life-contextual and life-decontextual appears to be important in light of research showing that students learn most efficiently when instructional materials reflect and incorporate their prior experience (Fingeret, 1991). Classroom activities using themes taken from the lives of adult learners have been seen to facilitate their acquisition of literacy. Adult literacy students have a limited amount of time for attending classes and studying, want skills that they can use in the context of their lives (Freire, 1993; Office of Technology Assessment, 1993), and often express a desire to use materials geared toward their day-to-day experience as adults and parents (Nwakeze & Seiler, 1993).

Use of materials and activities drawn from the learners' lives is supported by research that documents the powerful role of context in learning, the researchers note. For example, some workplace literacy programs teach literacy skills as they are needed within specific work contexts. Compared to programs that concentrated on more 'general' literacy, those that incorporated job-related materials were associated with larger increases in both job-related and general

literacy (Sticht, 1989). Once 'life-contextual' activities and materials are mass produced and mass prescribed, however, according to Purcell-Gates, they become increasingly distanced — or decontextualized — from the lives of the learners, in ways that may reduce their effectiveness. They can be used inappropriately.

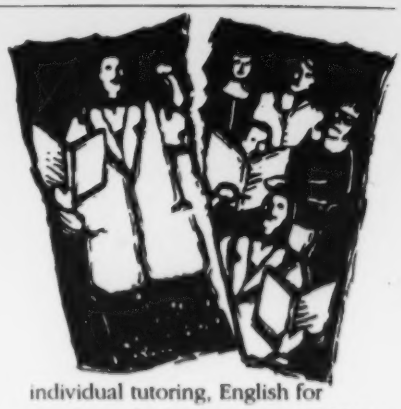
Dialogic / Monologic

Purcell-Gates, Degener, and Jacobson define dialogic education as including the student as a participant and partner in developing the goals, activities, and procedures of the class and program. This is in contrast to the more typical practice wherein students cede authority and power to the teacher or program structure for decisions regarding their learning. They refer to Freire (1993), who calls this latter type of education a 'banking' model, where the student is the passive recipient of the teacher's knowledge. The students retain their status as objects, according to Freire, and this precludes real learning or any significant changes in their lives. To be truly liberatory, Freire maintains, "education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" (p. 53).

The research team feels that a distinction between dialogic and monologic is important for more than political and philosophical reasons. Little research has been done on the influence of the structure of literacy instruction on students' acquisition of literacy (Lytle, 1994), the research team says. The studies that have been done have shown that students' learning is enhanced when they are active partners (Office of Technology Assessment, 1993) involved in decision making about their education program (Brizius & Foster, 1987). Fingeret (1991) notes that curriculum development is tantamount to teaching, and curriculum development and teaching depend upon a knowledge of students' cultures. In dialogic practice, the students can educate the instructors about their cultures and histories. Given the variety of cultures represented in adult basic education classrooms these days, this education may be crucial (NCAL, 1995), according to the researchers.

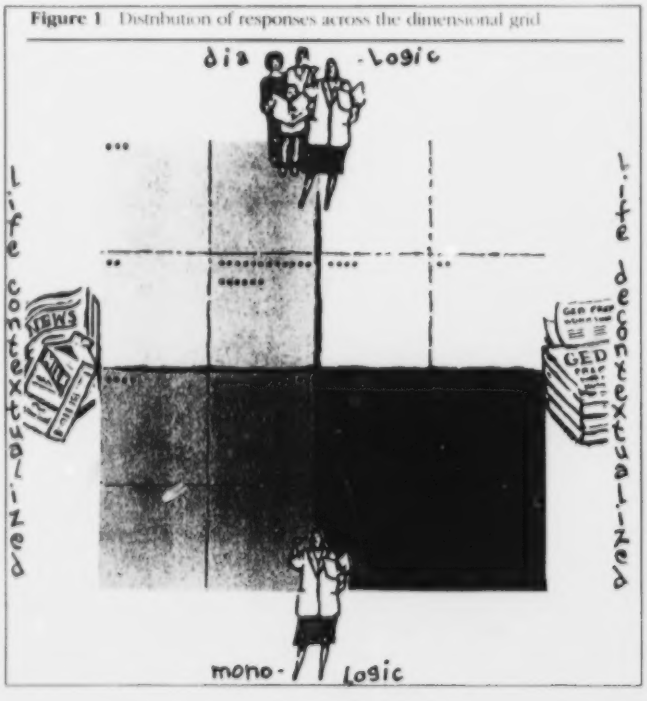
The Project

A total of 271 adult literacy programs, distributed across the U.S., were represented in the typology study. A wide variety of programs were included: adult literacy classes, individual tutoring, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), workplace literacy, family literacy programs, library-based programs, and prison education programs. Respondents filled out a one-page questionnaire that contained nine questions, some of which had subquestions: What is the structure of your program? Whole classes or individual tutoring? How often do classes meet? How many students do you serve? Do you consciously follow a model? (e.g., Kenan, Freire, Laubach, etc.); What are the explicit goals of your program? What are the students' goals? What learning activities do you use in each class: please give at least one example. What materials do you use? What texts are your students reading and writing? To what degree do students influence decisions about course content and classroom activities? How do you measure the success of your program? How are you funded? Can you characterize the demographics of your student population?



The team coded the responses along the two dimensions, reflecting how life-contextualized the literacy work was judged to be and how dialogic the program was judged to be. They developed an axis on

Figure 1 Distribution of responses across the dimensional grid



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which to chart the responses (see Figure 1). The first continuum, along the x-axis, measured how contextualized or decontextualized to the learners' lives a program is. Programs that use no skill books and have no set curricula, using all authentic materials, were considered highly life contextualized. Programs that use some published texts, mostly authentic texts, and concentrate on real-life issues were considered somewhat life-contextualized. Programs that are focused on skills, and tend to use published texts yet may occasionally use authentic texts were considered somewhat life decontextualized. Programs that have a set curriculum that focuses on skills and phonics were considered highly life-decontextualized

The second continuum, along the y-axis, measured how monologic or dialogic a program was. A highly dialogic program was one in which students work with teachers to create the course and are involved in all aspects of the program. A somewhat dialogic program was one in which student input is critical, students work with the teacher to create curriculum, and students are in charge of their own learning. A somewhat monologic program was one in which students' goal, interests, and needs are taken into account when creating course content; teachers and students periodically reflect on goals and whether or not the program is meeting them. In highly monologic programs, student have little or no input into course content.

Decontextualized / Monologic

The researchers found that the majority of the programs fell within the dimensional space of life-decontextualized and monologic. A total of 73 percent of the programs (n =197) were judged to consist of activities and materials somewhat to highly decontextualized, and these programs were somewhat to highly teacher-directed. Programs judged as life-contextual and teacher-directed made up the next most common dimensional category with 17 percent (n = 45). This was followed by the dimensional space of life-contextual, dialogic, to which eight percent (n = 23) of the responding programs were assigned. The fewest number of programs, two percent (n = 6), fell within the life-decontextualized, dialogic dimensional space. Looking at the two dimensions separately, programs were distributed differently along the two continua (see Figures 2 and 3).

Conclusions

The researchers admit that typing programs on the basis of a one-page questionnaire has validity problems; they had no opportunity to visit any of the programs. They also note that the results are limited to those programs with representatives who chose to reply.

Despite those limitations, the authors claim that this study is a first attempt to document systematically the distribution of some descriptive features of adult literacy programs in the U.S. The dimensions they chose for the typology are theoretically derived as potentially crucial to outcomes for participants in adult literacy programs. Thus, they point out, the typology has theoretical as well as practical potential for future studies.

Continued on page 14

Figure 2: Distribution of all responses along the life-contextualized – life-decontextualized continuum

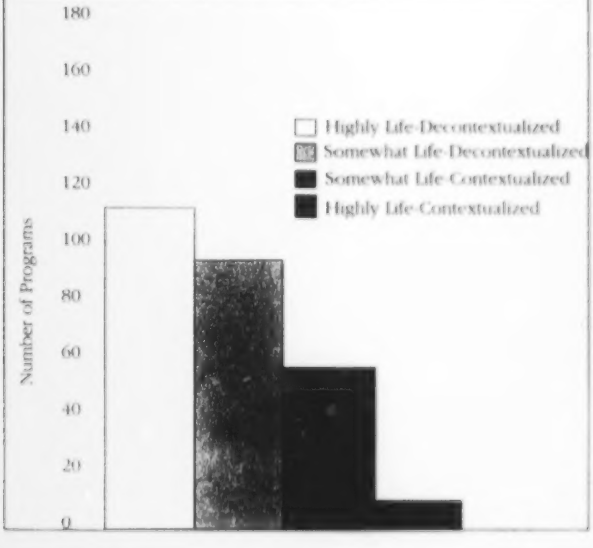
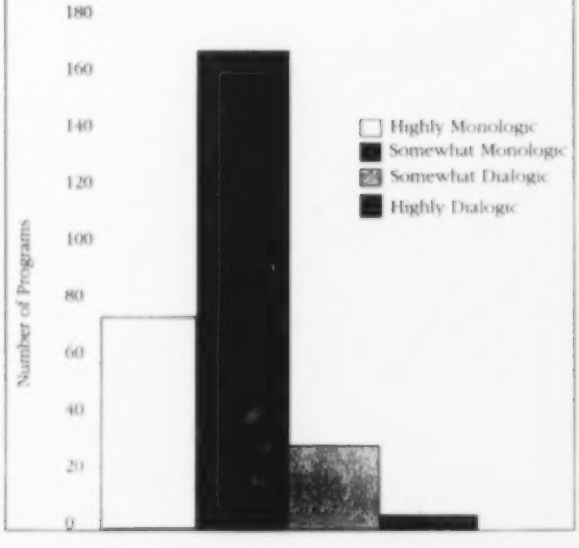


Figure 3: Distribution of all responses along the dialogic monologic continuum



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Purcell-Gates, Degener, and Jacobson reflect that it is not particularly surprising that most of the responding programs were judged to be more life-decontextualized and monologic. The model of literacy instruction wherein students are taught to read and to write from skills-based materials, and where the teacher is considered the expert and the director of this learning, is deeply embedded, they point out. Despite calls from adult educators for more programs rooted in the realities, expertise, and interests of the learners (Auerbach, 1995; Fingeret, 1987; Freire, 1993), only a small percentage of programs now in operation and captured by this study reflect those characteristics.

Noting that most of the programs clustered around the middle of the two-dimensional grid of characteristics, the researchers point out that the results may be comforting to those who worry about 'extremism.' They suggest that many teachers and program directors may feel the competing pulls of the two ends of the continua represented in this study. Most of the programs that used materials and activities from the actual lives of the students retained some teacher control over how they were used, by whom, and when. And many of the programs that relied on published adult literacy materials and skill books made some attempts to respond to the individual goals and needs of their students. Only a very few programs attempted to take Freirean theory to heart and create programs rooted in the lives of the participants and directed largely by their input and choices. It is worth noting, however, they say, that many more programs fell into the opposite quadrant of the two-dimensional grid. These programs were considered to be highly decontextualized and highly monologic. Students worked only with texts and materials written exclusively to teach isolated skills; they were assigned to them by teachers responding to assessments and to state or district guidelines.

Purcell-Gates and her team state that these results will inform a study on the relationships between program characteristics and change in out-of-classroom literacy activity by adult participants. The team's hypothesis is that programs whose content centers around real life literacy events, or potential ones, and whose content is reflective and respectful of the input and participation of the participants, will result in increased reading and writing in the lives of the students compared to those that do not reflect these characteristics. It is absolutely possible, however, they admit, that this hypothesis is either wrong, or simplistic, and that the program that results in the most change in reading and writing by the students in their out-of-class lives will include a balance of life-contextualized and isolated skill work determined more by the teacher than by the students. With the results of this survey, they have a context for describing programs on these theoretically derived dimensions.

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Retention and the GED

by Jamie D. Barron Jones

Having spent 12 years as a Director of Social Work Programs by day and a GED instructor by night, I have long been aware that my students face serious barriers in reaching their goals. Just entering a school building is stressful for some. More than once I have walked through the parking lot to invite potential students, anxious about returning to school, inside. I have manipulated every facet of the learning environment and curriculum that I could to make classes user friendly. Students complained that they could not sit comfortably at desks designed for high school students, so I changed the location of the classes to conference rooms equipped with large tables and comfortable chairs. I developed a thorough orientation and goal-planning program to introduce students to classes, answer any questions, and allay their concerns as to what was expected of them. I also individualized my curriculum as much as possible to target student needs. The students seemed genuinely pleased with the classes and their progress, yet absenteeism and retention problems persisted. In 1996, by the Christmas break, I was experiencing drop-out rates as high as 60 percent.

Consequently, during the break, I consulted 20 students. I discovered an array of problems and concerns that affected their classroom attendance, nearly all of which had nothing to do with academic ability. If students with such problems were to stay in class, I thought, the problems would have to be identified early on, before the students became overwhelmed and quit the program. I felt I had to find a way to elicit and address the concerns that could prevent my students from succeeding in class.

Action Research

At a teachers' meeting one afternoon, my supervisor suggested I join an action research group to explore strategies to address this issue. Action research is conducted within the confines of the classroom, by the teacher. I would choose the question to be researched and the data collection measures, and the results would be applicable to my concerns. I joined the group.

For my action research project I decided that, when new students came to class, I would interview them. I would attempt to discover why they had dropped out of high school, how dropping out had affected them, and what goals they had for the future. A few weeks later I would have them elaborate upon this in essays. I would use this information to refer students to appropriate social services. I also hoped that by demonstrating that I was interested in their lives, I would build stronger bonds with my students. My formal research question became "Will retention be improved by using interviews and creative writing assignments to identify barriers to attendance and providing referrals to services to address these barriers?" To document the research, I would take notes on interviews with students, collect writing assignments, maintain attendance records, and keep a journal, field notes, and anecdotal records.

The Intervention

The GED class I targeted to study was located in a rural community in the mountains of southwestern Pennsylvania. A total of 27 students were involved, including a comparison group of ten who attended class from September to December and did not participate in the retention invervention, and 17 new students who did. The students ranged in age from teenagers to senior citizens, 20 were female, seven male, all were white. They worked independently or in groups studying a full range of GED subjects. Classes met two evenings a week for three hours a night.

My program does not have an intake center. All orientation and testing are done in the classroom by the teacher. Those who are interested in joining a class simply walk in during any scheduled class session and begin. I frequently receive a phone call from the program administrator before a new student arrives, but often learners read recruitment posters or learn about the classes via word of mouth, and arrive unannounced.

Prior to conducting this research, I typically chatted with new students about their motivations for attending classes and their future goals. Although I encouraged a free exchange, because it was our first meeting I could not elicit much information. My first intervention in the action research project involved reformulating this talk into an in-depth fact-finding session. Taking new students one-by-one into a separate classroom, I began with general questions about why they had dropped out and were now enrolling. I asked about the positive aspects of their lives, such as families, work, hobbies, and interests, taking notes throughout. I spent a considerable

amount of time on goals and in reviewing the challenges and support systems they could expect to encounter. The interviews varied in length from ten to 20 minutes. The technique proved somewhat helpful, but, since we were just beginning our teacher-student relationship, the students were still not all that forthcoming.

After students had attended four classes and we had established a rapport, I invited them to complete a writing assignment about themselves. I explained that I was very interested in their success and wanted to be aware of their concerns. I asked them to respond in writing to the following questions. "People drop out of high school for many reasons. Why did you decide to drop out of high school? How has dropping out of high school affected your life and the lives of your family and those closest to you? What are your goals? Where do you see yourself a year from now? Why did you decide to pursue a GED at this time?"

I was hopeful that the students would consider their responses carefully and provide truthful, comprehensive answers. But I was unprepared for the painfully honest replies. Here are a few excerpts:

"Dropping out of school was the biggest mistake of my life...and has affected my life tremendously. It lowered my self-esteem a lot. I was embarrassed to tell people I quit. I felt like a failure...My sister quit school a few months after I did. I don't know if it was because of me and my mom's poor example, but she will find out how hard it will be to make a living without an education...I returned to school to feel better about myself and try to set an example for my younger sister."

"The consequences facing me after I dropped out were more than I bargained for. I came to find that you are not going to get hired for a job much above minimum wage. This problem was magnified when I found myself with two children barely a year apart in age. My situation landed me at the welfare office, someplace I had never pictured myself going. It is quite amazing where the choices you make and the path you choose take you...The GED classes are doing wonders for me. I feel a sense of accomplishing something more than just collecting a welfare check every two weeks. It is a wonderful feeling to have...We do things in our lives at times that seem right at the moment, failing to assess the consequences they may lead to in the future. Dropping out of high school is a choice, and does affect different people in many different ways. I myself have felt the burden of my choice, and I am sure many others have also."

"The reason I dropped out of school was because I was in many different foster homes and just the thought of meeting new people scared me. I was always moving from place to place. I would have friends, then I would suddenly be moved to another home...I was moved around so much that I never really had the chance to learn...Then one day I ran away, and I was nowhere to be found, so they signed me out of school, and I never went back. The main thing is that I'm here now, and I really want to learn. I decided to want something and that's my GED. My goal is to be able to look at the people that made me not want to learn and say to them...I did this on my own. I got my GED. And I'm very proud of myself."

These essays provided me with great insight into the lives of my students. In addition to reading them, I devoted class time to discussing the essays individually with each student. I became aware of their concerns and, in some cases, phobias about academics, and I gained a better understanding of the circumstances that had influenced their decisions to drop out and then to attend GED classes. Based upon what I learned from these essays and from conversations in class, I referred students to a variety of agencies, including the county assistance office, a local day care center, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Job Center, medical and vision services, Victim Services, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and job training. Sometimes I provided the application forms, assisted in their completion, and ensured that they were delivered. In other cases, I made phone calls on the behalf of the students. My experience as a social worker stood me in good stead, but all the information about services is accessible to the public. The support services assisted the students in diminishing or removing barriers to success in the program.

Results

Unlike the control group, the students in the intervention group arrived early and often stayed late to review materials. They formed their own out-of-class study groups. I spent my budget to the penny in an effort to keep them supplied with the materials — texts, workbooks, and study guides — that they requested. These efforts seemed to translate into academic gain.

Of the comparison group of ten students, only four successfully completed the program, for a retention rate of 40 percent. We consider program completion to be the receipt of a GED or a one or more grade level increase in Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) test scores. The intervention group of 17 students maintained an 82 percent retention rate. All 14 of the remaining learners — who had participated in the intervention — raised their reading and math levels by an average of two grade levels, compared to the comparison group who raised their on average only one grade level.

Nine of the 14 students completed applications for postsecondary training and one participated in a youth work experience program. None of the students in the comparison group enrolled in such programs.

Reflection

I embarked upon an action research project because I was concerned with retention. The intervention I chose — learning more about students through interview and essay writing, working to develop a rapport, and providing referrals to social services — resulted in both increased retention and impressive academic gains. The interviews and essays served as an impetus for bonding. I continually attempted to strengthen my relationship with the students by inquiring about personal interests and providing efforts for them to experience success in the classroom. Even if students were unable to complete an assignment correctly, I encouraged them by recognizing the diligent efforts they made. We grew as a community of learners. The study not only proved successful for the students, but also renewed my zeal for teaching. My students' excitement became contagious.

I will continue to utilize the interviews and essays, and to provide referrals with future groups and hope to enjoy similar success. In my view, although helping students deal with intense issues can be emotionally taxing, I would encourage other teachers to attempt such strategies. Students cannot thrive academically when they are overwhelmed with outside concerns.

About the Author

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The Spanish GED

The Door to Opportunity in Doña Ana County

by Anastasia K. Cotton and Bertha Cantú-Luján

Passing the GED in Spanish now rather than in English years from now makes sense to many Spanish speakers whose English language skills are limited. In southern New Mexico, the Doña Ana Branch Community College Spanish General Educational Development (GED) program provides classes for just this purpose. Anastasia Cotton and Bertha Cantú-Luján co-authored this story of their program. Ms. Cotton begins with a description of the region, the population, and the overall program. Ms. Cantú-Luján describes her students and her approach.

— Barbara Garner
Ms. Cotton

As GED Specialist for Doña Ana Branch Community College (DABCC), I travel throughout a service area of 126 miles, visiting classrooms and talking with teachers and students. Doña Ana County, New Mexico, is 3,805 square miles, larger than the state of Delaware. It is located in south-central New Mexico, on the Mexican border. Encompassing high mountain ranges, fertile valleys, and the high desert, Doña Ana County terrain is as varied as its population. Of the 162,849 residents (1995 county census), 56.4 percent are Hispanics; about three percent are Native Americans, Asians, African-Americans; whites make up the balance.

The grandeur of the area contrasts with the poverty of its people. Unemployment is high. Hispanics in the region average a per capita income of $6,056, which is well below the poverty level. The major source of income is seasonal agricultural labor. Six percent of the adults over the age of 18 do not speak English well or at all and 40 percent speak a language other than English at home.

In my sojourns about the county, I continually hear how difficult it is to find a job — any job — without a high school diploma or GED credential. The major employers (New Mexico State University, White Sands Missile Range, and other governmental agencies) demand secondary school credentials, even for custodial and food preparation jobs. About a third of the residents 18 and older have not completed high school. Local public schools average a 13 percent drop-out rate (DABCC, 1997). Many of our immigrant and migrant Spanish-speaking students from Mexico and Central and South America have had little or no education in their country of origin. In fact, 25 to 50 percent have not finished the sixth grade.

The Adult Basic Education Program at Doña Ana Branch Community College serves county residents by offering instruction in preparation for both the English and Spanish GED. The Spanish-language GED test has been in use since 1969. The general tests are similar to the English versions but are based on the Spanish language, culture, and social norms of Central and South America, Cuba, and Puerto Rico and were normed against graduating high school seniors in Puerto Rico.

All five major tests — mathematics, writing, science, social sciences, and interpretation of literature and the arts — must be taken within a two-week period, according to GED Testing Service policy in New Mexico. Our state requires a sixth test, *La prueba seis en inglés*, the English language proficiency test. This test may be taken after the two-week period elapses, but before the three year deadline (GEDTS Web page, http://www.acenet.edu). The English knowledge test, which many states do not require of their Spanish test takers, measures reading comprehension and vocabulary in English to the tenth grade level. Across New Mexico, only five percent of all official test examinees take the GED in Spanish, while in Doña Ana County, the number is higher: close to ten percent of GED examinees take the tests in Spanish.

At DABCC, 34 GED preparation classes are offered in 18 locations and serve about 550 students. About 25 percent of these students are studying in Spanish (DABCC, 1998), some of whom will take the test in English, others of whom will study for a few years before they are ready to test. Most of the students in the daytime classes are female. The evening classes have more males, since many men study after working in the fields during the day. These figures may be somewhat skewed because some students are enrolled in more than one class. Also, approximately 1,000 students are studying for the English and Spanish GED tests in three learning centers. Some of these students also attend classes.

Eight of the classes, totaling about 130 students, are taught in both English and Spanish. These classes are located in rural areas and a number are located in colonias: areas where the homes have less than the bare minimums in utilities and other amenities. Many of these students are at the lowest level of basic skills. The Spanish GED program provides students with access to the formal education they did not get. What I have noticed in these classes is that the students want and need time to study. They cannot or will not study at home; class time is the only time they have quiet, resources, and no interruption.

Ms. Cantú-Luján:

My students are, for the most part, immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries. The majority have less than a sixth-grade education. Their first priority upon arriving in the United States is to establish themselves in a community where they feel comfortable, namely, a Spanish-speaking neighborhood. Membership in a community where the manners and customs match those the newcomer already has results in social acceptance. This, in turn, helps people develop confidence, the comfort level needed for learning, and a sense that they are fitting in.

As the Hispanic family gets settled and begins to stabilize financially, family members have time to reflect on life, work, and personal development. My students look at continuing their education as one method of achieving a major life goal.

Reality

When facing a roomful of eager, adult faces in a Spanish GED class, I sense their expectation that hard work brings just rewards. I want very much to help them get what they desire for themselves through their own efforts. That means I start with an honest and straightforward explanation of the GED process. I talk about the reading level skills needed, the math concepts tested, and the degree of written language fluency required. I explain the GED test scores and their meaning, the need to possess literacy skills in English, and the limited two-week window of opportunity to take the five core tests.

The dose of realism is gulped down, almost audibly, by the students. Then I deliver the "you-can-get-it-if-you-really-want-it" speech. The students get the Adult Basic Education Center's schedules for tutoring, mini-workshops, and skills labs; an outline of the required GED competencies and where and how they can find help outside of class to master the skills they need; and how to get support from the Quintana Learning Center's staff to meet their academic goals. The Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), Level M in Spanish, is the diagnostic test available for identifying areas of strength and weakness, such as division of fractions, multiplication of decimals, measurements, and vocabulary in context. Students who have low skills can work on identified areas of weakness at GED

workshops, small group sessions, and individual tutoring.

Classroom instruction lasts approximately two hours twice a week for 12 weeks. In mixed-level Spanish GED classes, I usually use the first hour to target a competency most of the students seem to need. During this hour the class as a whole receives instruction, employs directed learning, and practices the new material.

The second hour of class is set aside for the students to work on their individual education plans (IEP). We develop them jointly, after reviewing the scores on the TABE. In individual conferences with the students, I recommend a short-term learning goal, such as finding the common denominator, and two or three objectives for meeting that target. I document it so that both the student and I have copies. Most students look forward to the second hour because they get the attention they need, particularly if they have problems understanding the guided-practice items from the first hour of class or the practice sheets they took home to do from the previous class.

The lack of adult-oriented, Spanish language materials for teachers and students has been a challenge our program. Many resources for English for Speakers of Other Languages exist, but content area learning materials are hard to come by. Right now, ARCO publishes one Spanish GED book. In the fall of 1998, Contemporary Books is scheduled to issue a Spanish GED text and workbook.

Instructors find that the ARCO book does not meet the learning needs of most of the Spanish GED population in Doña Ana County. The material is designed for the student who has the basic academic skills to take the official test, but just needs a review. So, most remedial materials are teacher-made and informally shared among the instructors. The sole purpose of giving a text to a student is often to foster self-esteem and create a collegiate atmosphere, serving to establish that the student is a student.

Conclusion

The Spanish GED program is a valued commodity in Doña Ana County. In the year from September, 1996, to September, 1997, the number of students taking the complete battery of exams was 155 as compared to 147 the previous year. This contrasts with the number of English GED exam takers, which dropped by 200 during the same year. Many of our Spanish GED graduates continue in English for speakers of other languages classes to become more proficient in their second language. They have achieved their short-term goal of passing the GED. Now they are on their way to meeting their long-term goals.

Long-Term Dreams

In a recent questionnaire for a Spanish GED class, we noted that the majority of the students, whose median age is 35, hold similar long-term dreams: to continue their educations beyond the acquisition of the GED certificate. Students responded to the question, "What are your long term goals?" with the following answers:

- *"Tener una casa propia, estar bien económicamente, conocer cuidades, estados, ser una mujer profesional, etc."*
  To have my own house, to be economically well, to get to know cities, states, be a professional woman, etc.

- *"Tener una casa nueva y un buen trabajo"*
  To have a new house and a good job

- *"Una casa para mi hijo"*
  A house for my son

- *"Poder depender de mí misma con un buen trabajo y ayudar a mis hijos"*
  To be independent with a good job and to help my children

- *"Estudiar algo más que el GED, una carrera corta"*
  To study something beyond the GED, a short course of study (certificate or A.A.)

- *"Hacer todo lo mejor, y traer prosperidad a mi familia (educación, trabajo y salud)"*
  To prosper in every way for the better and bring prosperity to my family (education and work and health)

- *"Mis sueños son terminar una carrera profesional y dominar el inglés, para de esta forma abrirme camino en la vida."*
  My dreams are to finish studies for a career and to become fluent in English, so that I may open roads of opportunity in my life.

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Anastasia K. Cotton, who has a masters in education from Edinboro State University, PA, has been the GED Specialist at NMSU-DABCC since 1994. She started in Adult Basic Education (ABE) as an instructor in Italy in the 1970s. Since then she has taught and tutored ABE, GED, and ESOL.

Bertha Cantú Luján has a masters in public administration from New Mexico State University. She has been an ABE instructor since 1980 at different sites in Texas and New Mexico. She teaches U.S. Citizenship, ESOL, Spanish GED, English GED, and has also been a public school teacher for 13 years.

Changing Approaches to Math

As the GED changes, so must instruction. Cynthia Zengler describes how her approach to math has evolved.

by Cynthia J. Zengler

When I began teaching mathematics in the mid-1970s, I taught students new mathematical concepts and followed up with a set of word problems using these concepts. Of course, the problems fit the new concepts and only required the students to identify which new concept was used. I emphasized key words such as 'of' for multiplication and 'grouped' for division. To improve as a teacher, I joined the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and began to read their literature, but did not really apply it to my practice.

As my career evolved, I had the opportunity to attend meetings and workshops on mathematics. In addition to teaching mathematics part time for a community college, I became an editor, involved in developing mathematics textbooks. I worked with authors who were actively involved in research on teaching and learning mathematics. I had to think about trends in math and what math should look like in the future.

In 1987, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics published standards for the mathematics curriculum that included more than just computation. The Council suggested including skills such as developing conjectures, reasoning through phenomena, building abstractions, validating assertions, and solving problems (NCTM, 1987). My worlds began to clash. How could I develop textbooks that suggested one method of developing problem-solving skills and use an antiquated method in my own practice? The NCTM recommendations made me rethink my teaching, which has not been easy. It is a continuing process that involves reading, reflection, and experimentation.

The Change

I taught business mathematics at a community college and math for the tests of General Educational Development (GED) at a community-based program to students who had been less than successful with mathematics. My students were typically older than 25 and trying to improve themselves so they could qualify for a promotion at work. I heard the normal anxieties about mathematics. Students would say, "I could never do mathematics," "I hope you have patience. You will need it," "I really need help," and "I hate math." The business course emphasized applying mathematics to various business topics such as mark up and mark down, trade discounts, and interest. When I emphasized strategies in problem solving, I received blank stares and panic.

The NCTM literature I had been reading suggested a four-step model, which I began using. The steps, which all need to be completed, are read the problem, decide what to do, solve the problem, and answer the question. They seem easy, but disciplining myself to follow them was hard.

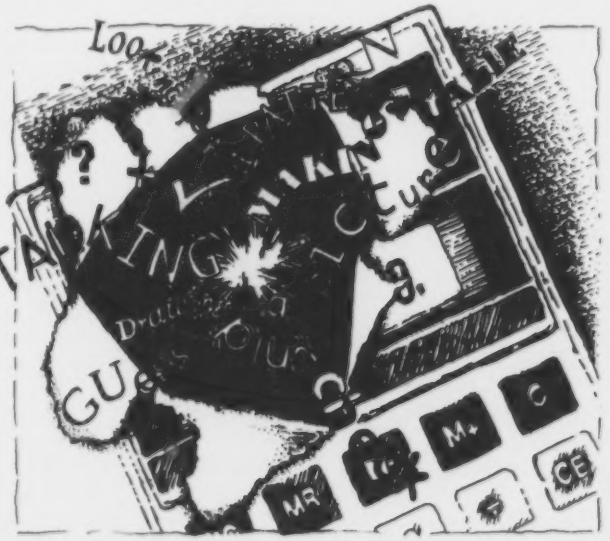
I noticed that, as students encountered numbers in word problems, they wrote them down, regardless of whether they had completely read the problem or not. Well, I did that myself some times. I decided to model the method to ensure that the students — and I — would apply the steps. Now, as the first step, I have someone read the problem aloud to the class and we all listen.

The second step — decide what to do — is the most difficult to teach. To help students focus their thinking, and to wean them from dependence upon key words, I started using three questions: What do you want to find? What do you know? How are they related? Once the students answer these questions, they tend to understand the problem better. For example, a baseball team won 17 more games than they lost. If they played 52 games and tied three, how many games did they lose? The answer to "What do you want to find?" is how many games did the team lose? You know that the team played 52 games, tied three games, and won 17 more games than they lost. This information is related in this way: games won plus games lost plus games tied equals total games, or $(X + 17) + X + 3 = 52$.

The third step is often the easiest because it is usually a calculation. The fourth step, answering the question, is not redundant. Often the initial solution only responds to part of the question asked. Getting my class to use the model often caused stress for my students and me. Since I was continuing to refocus myself to include more strategies for problem solving, I had to reinforce my own thinking. I began using the model whenever we did a problem in class.

and found this helpful in reinforcing the importance of the process. Sometimes I forgot to apply the method. My class would tell me to stop and ask myself the three questions. This helped give my students confidence in their own abilities. The atmosphere of the classroom changed from "the dreaded math class" to "a fun class." Including myself in the learning process created an atmosphere in which students felt freer to share their ideas.

I read all the NCTM journals, finding *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School* the most useful. The more I read about problem solving, the more I encouraged my students to think and trust themselves. They could use various strategies to solve problems if they could explain how they arrived at their solution. One strategy the students were amazed that I would allow was guess-and-check. They soon realized, however, that guessing takes longer than a more mathematical solution. As we went over their work, I had the students share their approaches. This provided them with an opportunity to develop trust in themselves and to feel less anxious about finding 'the' way to do a problem.



Example

Here is an example of a set of problems I have used as part of the initial lesson on problem solving.

1. If each letter of the alphabet has a price attached to it (A=0.01, B=0.02, C=0.03, and so on), find the price of your name. For example, the name FRED is worth 33 cents because F is worth 6 cents, R is worth 18 cents, E is worth 5 cents, and D is worth 4 cents.

2. Given that the alphabet has the above values, find five words that are worth exactly $0.50. [One solution is joy = 10 (j) + 15 (o) + 25 (y) = 50 cents].

Once the students have determined the value of their names, I form groups to work on the second question. After allowing a reasonable time for the groups to complete the activity, we discuss the various approaches they used, emphasizing the fact that many approaches exist. One strategy used by the groups is to find one word and see if rearranging the letters can form other words. For example, since joy is worth 50 cents, do "jyo", "yoj", " yjo", "ojy", or "oyj" also make words? This activity can be extended by changing the values of the letters or by finding words that equal other values.

Using a model for solving problems has given my students a tool for solving any problem, not just those with key words they can identify. The students in my classes have begun to solve more difficult problems consistently and with more confidence.

Assessment

My approach to assessment has also evolved. Once I started using various approaches to teach problem solving in my practice, I realized I had to refocus my assessment to include more open-ended questions that challenge the thought process of my students. As I have developed assessment over the last several years, I have kept in mind the need to assess areas such as thinking critically, analyzing how to do a problem, making conclusions that are valid, and evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of a method.

As I began my teaching career, my favorite assessment method was the typical question and answer method that requires students to produce a number. Now, I include essay questions. Sometimes the students are amazed when I want them to describe their approaches to a problem rather than produce an answer. "I thought this was math class, not English class," said one student.

I also use group quizzes in which group members are responsible for ensuring that each member understands the concept. Each group gives me one paper with all the answers. I choose a member of the group to present one of their solutions to the class. Initially students thought that they would have nothing to offer the group, but all students, regardless of their mathematical level, contribute to the discussion. The group setting often provides students a 'safe' way to discuss their approach to a problem. These quizzes have given some students a new confidence in their mathematical ability. John had barely passed any math class he had taken and truly believed he could offer nothing to the group discussion. After one such quiz, he told me that he was surprised that he could actually teach

the others something about the problem. He was so proud. So was I.

The New GED

The current GED mathematics test emphasizes problem solving that requires the application of computational skills to life situations. The GED 2000 Series Test, being developed, is shifting the content of the mathematics tests to more involvement with data analysis, statistics, and probability (Woodward, 1998). The GED Testing Service mathematics specifications committee has even recommended the use of calculators for the major part of the mathematics test (Manly, 1998). As a GED instructor, I found that the students had the same anxieties and panic as my business mathematics students. I see the need for those preparing for the GED to learn how to approach a problem. The new GED will expect the students to analyze a problem and to make conclusions based on their findings. The more confident students become in their mathematical abilities, the better prepared they will be for not only the GED but for the changing work place.

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About the Author

Cynthia J. Zengler has a masters degree in Mathematics Education and is working toward a doctorate in adult education. She is the project manager for a multi-year evaluation design project for the Ohio Department of Education, Adult and Basic Literacy Education programs. She has taught mathematics at many levels, including GED preparation classes.

research

The Process of Passing the GED

"Much work has been done on the impact of the GED," says John Tyler, researcher on a National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) study of the GED. "We don't know much about the testing process itself, though. Which tests provide the highest hurdles? For whom does the re-testing feature of the GED matter the most? Who would be most affected in a move to raise the passing standards? This study attempts to answer those questions."

To obtain a General Educational Development credential (GED), a candidate must take a battery of five tests covering mathematics, writing, science, social sciences, and interpretation of literature and the arts. Passage in most states requires that a test taker's scores on all tests be above a minimum standard, and that the average of the five tests be above a minimum standard. The GED Testing Service (GEDTS) sets minimum standards; individual states can set higher standards. (Policies may vary from state to state, and were changed in 1997.)

GED candidates can re-take tests, and many of them do. While local policy may differ, GEDTS policy allows candidates to take the tests individually, in whatever sequence they choose, or all at once. "The system is potentially complicated," Tyler explains, "with candidates making choices about re-testing or quitting, as well as about which tests to take at each attempt."

Using data from the state Departments of Education in Florida and Connecticut, he studied the test-taking process of GED candidates who were 16 to 21 years of age when they tested in those states between 1988 and 1990. He had 15,610 observations from Florida and 4,600 from Connecticut. The study differentiates between whites, Hispanics, and African Americans. Other ethnic groups were represented in such low numbers that they could not be reported.

Most GED teachers would say that the math test is the hardest for their students to pass. The next hardest is the writing test. Tyler's research validates this. In Florida and Connecticut, among those test takers who failed to receive a GED, the math and writing tests generated the lowest scores. "But," Tyler says, "we found considerable gender differences." In both states, the females who failed to pass the GED scored lowest on the math test, for males, the writing test was hardest. This suggests that male drop outs leave school with relatively poorer writing skills than do females; females leave with relatively weaker math skills. While many studies of K-12 students show similar trends, the research Tyler did uncovered stark differences. Teachers who take this into account by providing extra help in math for women and in writing for men, for example, may improve their students' GED pass rates.

Across ethnicity, the states differed, which was curious. In Connecticut, a much higher percentage of African-Americans relative to both whites and Hispanics

found the math test to be the hardest. This difference was not found in Florida.

Testing and Re-Testing

Tyler and colleagues also looked at patterns of test taking. Do people take them all at once, or a few tests at a time? Who passes the first time around? Who re-tests? The full battery takes seven hours and 35 minutes to complete, so it might seem appealing to space them out. Tyler found, however, that about 93 percent of candidates in Connecticut and 96 percent in Florida took all tests on the first attempt. No significant gender or racial differences appeared.

As Tyler points out, "People can take the practice tests and get a pretty good idea of whether or not they are going to pass. So you'd think that people would know when they were ready to take the test, and that everyone who took the test would come pretty close to passing." This is not the case. Overall, only about 64 percent of those in the study passed on the first attempt, and many had results that were far from passing.

Racial differences in pass rates surfaced. Within each state, whites passed the first time at higher rates than Hispanics and Hispanics passed at higher rates than African-Americans. Across states, the patterns bear further examination: only small initial pass rate differences appeared across states for whites and Hispanics, but the initial pass rates for African-Americans were substantially higher in Connecticut than in Florida.

Data on re-testing, a key feature of the GED system, are presented in Table 1. While everyone benefits from the re-testing option, the African-American pass rate rose the most. "This finding raises the same plausible set of conclusions as the section on who struggles most with which test," explains Tyler. "Namely, it indicates that whites drop out with a much better set of skills than minority group members. What are the implications of this? Does the GED lead to improved skills for minority group members, since they would, on average, have more preparation to do to pass the exams? Or is it possible that the re-testing feature subverts this possible route to better skills by primarily serving as a 'try it till I pass' vehicle? These racial differences on first attempt have never before been revealed. They are an important piece that has been missing from our understanding."

Figure 1 Proportion of candidates who passed on their first attempt and ultimately, by demographic group, in Connecticut and Florida

	Connecticut			Florida		
	Whites	African-Americans	Hispanics	Whites	African-Americans	Hispanics
Pass rates on the initial attempt	0.775	0.538	0.600	0.762	0.440	0.639
Ultimate pass rates	0.893	0.724	0.723	0.864	0.580	0.750

In trying to interpret those findings, limitations of the data leave some important questions unanswered. "We just don't have enough information to answer additional questions, and there will always be unanswered questions," Tyler states. "For example, even if we had a flag for program participation, we would like to have information on the quality of programs, length of time in programs, what the program did. Even if we had program participation information, severe selection problems would confound interpretation. For example, what if we found that program participants had higher initial pass rates than non-participants? Would that be an indication that participation in the program tended to raise scores relative to what they would have been otherwise? Or, does it indicate that more able and conscientious drop outs tend to enroll in programs as insurance for passing, while less motivated drop outs tend not to enroll? Without more data, we don't know the answer to that.

"Alternatively, what if we found that program participants tended to have lower initial pass rates than non-participants? That does not necessarily tell us that the program is doing nothing. It could be that the most unskilled are enrolling in programs, that the programs are doing a good job on average in raising scores, but they are dealing with a very unskilled group relative to the non-program population."

Still Working

Tyler is now working on understanding who would be affected in a move to raise passing standards. He is checking to see if race differences exist for those who fail on the first attempt but are right on the margin and those who fail dramatically on the first attempt. And he will also look at people who are right on the margin of passing and see if the gender differences in math and writing exist there. "Maybe when you get to people with higher levels of basic cognitive skills, the gender differences wash out," he suggests.

For more information on his work, contact John Tyler via e-mail at tylerjo@hugse1.harvard.edu. The findings of his study of the economic impact of the GED begin on page 1 of this issue; the full report can be ordered for $10 from NCSALL *Reports*, World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210. The full report on testing patterns will be available from the same address next fall.

— by Barbara Garner

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NCSALL Research

• Copies of the full technical reports of NCSALL-sponsored research are available from World Education for $10 each. To order *The Economic Impact of the GED* by John Tyler, Richard Murnane, and John Willett or *U.S. Adult Literacy Program Practice: A Typology Across Dimensions of Life-Contextualized/Decontextualized and Dialogic/Monologic* by Victoria Purcell-Gates, Sophie Degener, and Erik Jacobson, contact the NCSALL *Reports* Editor, World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210-1211; telephone (617) 482-9485; e-mail NCSALL@WorldEd.org.

GED Resources and Research

• Baldwin, J., Kirsch, I.S., Rock, D. & Yamamoto, K. *The Literacy Proficiencies of GED Examinees: Results from the GED-NALS Comparison Study*. (Washington, DC: American Council on Education and Educational Testing Service, 1995) Available from GED Fulfillment Service, (301) 604-9073 or fax (301) 604-0158. *GED Statistical Reports* and an information bulletin on the tests of General Educational Development is also available from the GED Fulfillment Service.

• *GED Items*, the newsletter of the GED Testing Service, are available free from the Subscriptions Manager, GED Testing Service, American Council on Education, One Dupont Circle NW, Suite 250, Washington, DC 20036-1163.

• Information about the tests of General Educational Development, a list of GED program contacts in the 50 states, Canada, and overseas, and GED publications information are available online at http://www.acenet.edu/programs/CALEC/GED/home.html.

• Johnson, M. & Valentine, T. *Outcomes of GED Graduation: An Annotated Bibliography of Research Reports*. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, Department of Adult Education, College of Education, 1992)

Project-Based Instruction

• The project, "Something to Think About," has been published on the Internet at http://members.aol.com/CulebraMom/jrhigh.html. Print copies are available from The Texas Center for Adult Literacy and Learning Clearinghouse at 1-(800)-441-7323.

GED Math

• For online resources related to GED math, visit the Teachers' Place http://www.forum.swarthmore.edu/teachers/adult.ed/

Spanish Language Literacy

• For a bibliography entitled "Spanish Native Language Literacy Instruction" (1996), contact NCLE, Attn: Product Orders, 1118 22nd Street NW, Washington, DC 20037 Fax (202) 659-5641. For additional resources on Spanish language literacy instruction, visit the NCLE web site at http://www.cal.org/ncle

NCSALL Web Site

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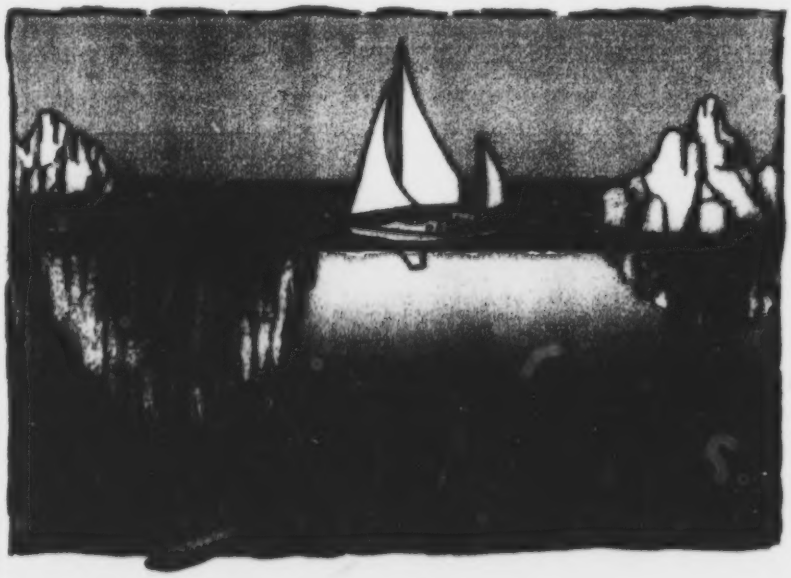

Why is Change So Hard?

Theories and thoughts about the organizational change process

by Marcia Drew Hohn

As one of the directors of the Massachusetts system of state literacy resource centers, I have helped introduce and advance many organizational change initiatives. My office has offered training, technical assistance, political forums, and management round tables to promote and assist the organizational change process. Despite these efforts, good intentions on all sides, and much hard work, many of these initiatives disappeared into programmatic black holes. Programs recognized the need to change and reached out for help, but often got stuck. I was puzzled. What was going on here? Do organizations inherently resist change? To start answering these questions, I investigated the organizational change process as it is experienced in program and staff development. In this article, I will share some of the insights I gained and take you on a journey of ships, seas, winds, and icebergs (and, to be honest, I thought up this iceberg stuff long before the recent release of the movie "Titanic").

Continued on page 3

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Focus on Basics is the quarterly publication of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. It presents best practices, current research on adult learning and literacy, and how research is used by adult basic education teachers, counselors, program administrators, and policymakers. *Focus on Basics* is dedicated to connecting research with practice, to connecting teachers with research and researchers with the reality of the classroom, and by doing so, making adult basic education research more relevant to the field.

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National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

WORLD EDUCATION

Welcome to *Focus on Basics*

Dear Readers,

Staff developers dedicate their careers to it. Researchers hope their findings will bring it about. Policymakers believe they can legislate it. Teachers do it all the time. What is it? Change. In this issue of *Focus on Basics*, we examine both organizational and individual change, and consider the staff development models that foster them.

Marcia Drew Hohn starts us off with a look at some theories of organizational change. The only truly transformative change, she points out, is one that involves a paradigm shift: a fundamental rethinking of premises. This is best done within a change-friendly environment, where information is shared and staff are encouraged to take risks. Bringing this about, she cautions, is not easy.

Change is happening somewhat more easily since director Hilary Stern instituted weekly reflection meetings for staff at CASA Latina, an adult literacy program in Seattle. Reducing staff turnover — a common problem in adult basic education — also served to increase commitment to long-term change. See the article on page 12 for more on this organization's strategies and struggles.

A program in Knox County, Tennessee, is undergoing a paradigm shift. Staff are using Malcolm Baldridge Criteria for Performance Excellence, an approach developed in the business community and adapted for educational institutions, to examine systematically their operations and improve them. They have learned, write authors Jane Cody, James Ford, and Kathleen Hayward, that being orderly and using data to make decisions does not necessarily mean 'bureaucratic.'

Teacher-educator Virginia Richardson examines the premise that teachers are reluctant to change. Teachers change all the time, she has found. The question then becomes: What sort of change will lead to student success, and how can it be fostered? She shares her views in the article that begins on page 7.

Sometimes change is unplanned. Immersion in a truly learner-centered process caused Edith Cowper to rethink her ideas about what it means to be learner-centered. She soon had a chance to put her newly honed beliefs into practice. Jereann King also had to grapple with what it means to be learner-centered, in her case when facilitating a group with an agenda and values quite different from her own. The facilitator and the learners all learned and changed, as should be the case.

• • •

We at NCSALL are always learning and changing. In the last issue of *Focus on Basics*, we published the results of an important new research study on the economic impact of the GED. A few readers pointed out that some of the hypothetical examples given in an exploration of the reasons for the results can be construed as racist, and by not noting those as such, we were condoning such actions. We certainly do not condone racism in any form, and apologize for any appearance we gave of doing so. We thank our readers for their thoughtful comments and will watch more carefully for this in the future.

Sincerely,

Barbara Garner

Barbara Garner
Editor

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Change...

continued from page 1

What We Know

We know from research on change in schools that resistance to and rejection of change can occur for a variety of reasons (Williams, 1993). William's research has also shown that change efforts need to be a combination of 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' strategies, strongly led, and combining pressure to change with the support to do so: support in terms of time, financial resources, and decision-making power.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1997) emphasizes that change-friendly organizations are future oriented. They seek to close the gap between current performance and an organization's potential. Change-friendly organizations embrace a 'learning together' approach characterized by a broad spectrum of participation within the organization and among stakeholders. Change-friendly organizations form networks to exchange knowledge and view differences as opportunities to grow. Their leaders create cultures in which people are challenged to take risks.

What I learned from my research is that the greatest barrier to organizational change has to do with the operating paradigm, or mind set, of the individuals and groups that make up an organization. Organizations are, after all, groups of people connected through common purposes into a systematic form to achieve particular ends (Morgan, 1997). While groups are sets of people small enough for their members to know and interact with one another, organizations are often large and the individuals who work in them only dimly perceive the total organization. Most of the human processes that happen within a formal organization actually take place in small groups, and organizational behavior can be understood by examining the ways of thinking and human processes of those groups (Pfeiffer & Ballew, 1991).

Varieties

Pfeiffer & Ballew (1991) point to the work of Marilyn Ferguson (1980) as useful in understanding the varieties of change. Ferguson classifies change into four types, described here.

1. Change by exception is where we allow exceptions to our beliefs but do not change our beliefs. For example, when we meet someone who does not fit our stereotypes, we classify them as being an exception to the group. The multi-pierced, skateboarding teenager who is polite and well-spoken may conflict with our assumptions about teenagers as rude and inarticulate, so we classify this particular one as an 'exception' but we do not change our beliefs about teenagers in general.

2. Incremental change is so gradual that it occurs before we become aware of it: usually, a collection of small changes that ultimately alter our belief systems. For example, a teacher may have started using technology with an attitude of resistance and disdain, but gradually changed to a point where technology became an indispensable tool in her practice. The teacher could probably not pinpoint the time where her beliefs about technology changed.

3. Pendulum change is when an extreme point of view is exchanged for its opposite. The hawk turns into a dove, the heathen turns into a religious zealot, or vice versa. Government programs are seen as the solution to social problems and then as having no viable role. Pendulum change ignores the past, ascribing no positive attributes to the previous points of view. The new belief is often as zealously held as the old.

4. Paradigm change is when we 'step out of the box' for a more fundamental rethinking of premises. Discordant information is considered and integrated and new ways of thinking emerge. As Ferguson (1980) points out, it is only paradigm change that promotes transformation, and for transformation, or true organizational change, to occur, the beliefs that control behaviors must undergo the more profound mind set change.

> ***"...the greatest barrier to organizational change has to do with the operating paradigm, or mind set, of the individuals and groups that make up an organization."***

Paradigm

A paradigm is a model of how the world works that permits the holder to interpret and use new information. A paradigm is the general perspective from which we view the world. A paradigm shapes perceptions and practices in nearly unconscious and unquestioned ways. It shapes what we look at, how we look at things, what we label as problems, what problems we decide to address, and what methods we use. It is a way of filtering and

making sense of all the information that bombards us daily (Maguire, 1987; Wheatly, 1992). Ten years ago, paradigms were rarely applied to the analysis of organizations. Now, organizations regularly discuss and strategize about shifting paradigms. The idea that organizations can shift their paradigms is extremely powerful. It means that individuals and groups can define how they view and interpret the world around them, and begin organizing behavior around new way of thinking that can significantly transform organizations.

Systems Theory

At this time in history, we seem to be caught between two ways of thinking: analytical, expressed by the machine metaphor, and synthetical, which seeks interconnectedness and wholeness as expressed in metaphors such as webs, fluid mosaics, and rivers. In the analytical way of thinking, the world is seen as a machine. The underlying assumption is that phenomena can best be understood by being broken down, reduced into individual parts, and examined part by part. In this school of thought, the scientific method, objectivity, linear thinking, either-or thinking, and competition are promoted and presumed to be free from values and independent of context.

Synthetical thinking, or 'systems' thinking, popularized for organizations by Peter Senge (1990) and Meg Wheatley (1992), emphasizes putting things together. In this view, the system as a whole is more than the sum of its parts. Localness, harmony, cooperation, and a sense of mutual dependence are promoted, contextualized in the values and meaning systems of those involved. Systems theory, being about a world view, helps us understand paradigms. Systems theory helps us understand how deeply ingrained assumptions about how the world works shape our habits and minds and our society's organizations and institutions in a continuous process of reinforcement.

In the organizational realm, Morgan (1997), an organizational theorist and consultant, writes that old ways of thinking, represented by the machine concept of the world, are so ingrained in us that they are difficult to recognize, let alone shake off. They have been the basis for the educational and political structures and social institutions that guide our lives. Therefore, "...we get stuck in taken-for-granted ways of thinking and stuck in actions that are inappropriate for dealing with the problems and situations at hand. We operate in narrow, technical concerns, characteristic of the machine age" (p. 277). We are unable to make the transformative organizational changes needed to increase our productivity and address problems creatively.

"...old ways of thinking ... are so ingrained in us that they are difficult to recognize, let alone shake off."

Three-Pronged Process

Kurt Lewin (1951), the father of organizational development, saw change as a three-pronged process: unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. Unfreezing involves loosening or melting ways of thought, behaviors, or sets of often unconscious behaviors that work against productivity in solving social problems and conflict. Once the ices of thought patterns or behaviors inhibiting productivity are melted, they flow into more natural channels until cooled enough to refreeze in more functional and congruent patterns. The new patterns remain until they are once again challenged by the perception of the need to change again. Lewin's formula for change is elegantly simple but fearsomely difficult to put into practice. Fortunately, Gareth Morgan (1997) has introduced a way to actualize Lewin's concept of the change process.

Imaginization

Morgan, an organizational theorist and consultant, introduced the term and process "imaginization"as a way to break free from habits of the mind and heart into space that allows for acting differently within organizations, to unfreeze, move and refreeze. Morgan sees metaphor as the primary means through which we forge our relationship to the world. According to Morgan, the images we hold of ourselves and the world can either constrain or expand our potential for transformation. By developing an image of an organizational structure, a problem area, or the future, we gain insight into how our organization operates and what it will take to change. Nature supplies many excellent ideas for imaging. For example, we might imagine organization as an ant colony, a spider plan, a river, or a web.

Morgan's ideas about imaginization led me to think about conceiving of an organizational change initiative in which I was deeply involved as ships, seas, winds, and icebergs. This gave me a way to "imagine" what was facilitating and what was inhibiting the adult basic education programs' abilities to engaging in a participatory planning process. It was also a way to

understand why programs were having so much difficulty with a seemingly simple process. So come with me on a journey into images. Think of two adult basic education programs, one school-based and one community-based, as sailing ships in the organizational sea of a participatory planning process: cold seas where icebergs are common.

Strong prevailing winds help the programs begin their journey. Fueling these winds are a well thought-out, systematic planning process with a number of useful and practical implementation tools as well as support through training, technical assistance, and dollars allocated for staff time. Other sources of momentum include the professionalization and enhanced confidence of programs as a result of five years of intense program and staff development, and the desire and capacity of the programs to plan and deliver quality services.

The Logistics Iceberg

The two adult basic education ships are sailing the organizational seas of a participatory planning process. They have made it out of the harbor and are sailing along with gusto when the first iceberg appears. It is small and highly visible. This is the logistics iceberg, where the investment of time and resources needed to carry out the planning process is at odds with part-time staff and capricious and multiple funding sources. In this iceberg are found such difficulties as getting day and evening staff together for planning, including night-time staff who have other jobs during the day, and finding time to carry out the process and the action plans because some funders do not provide funds for planning.

The logistics iceberg is not insignificant, but the ships slip around it with creative thinking. The crucial issue is whether a program and its management understand and support the entire planning process. The looming and more hidden icebergs have to do with habit and mind set: the paradigm in which the program and its staff are operating. These are the potentially formidable barriers to implementing a process that presumes teamwork, cooperation, and power sharing for learning together about solving problems and making improvements.

The Way Business is Done

The way business is done, or habit, iceberg contains existing approaches and structures by which the program operates. This iceberg is not highly visible and has deep and jagged edges, which can fatally damage the ships. If the operating norms of a program are ones of isolation, authoritarianism, and mistrust, then the organizational environment will be hostile to a participatory planning process. People in organizations do not organize their behavior around processes introduced from the outside. They organize their behavior around the operating norms that contribute to the culture of the organization. A program in which staff rarely meet or even talk to each other, and in which helping one another is not valued, is not a likely place to use a participatory planning process effectively. Such programs are usually managed by a director whose style is top-down and who has little history of consulting staff about programmatic, funding, and personnel issues. Such directors may act in a highly paternalistic or materialistic manner and are unlikely to share their decision-making power. This type of environment tends to generate mistrust and competition and inhibits the development of skills necessary to work in a cooperate, participatory manner.

Programs that have already been operating in a participatory, collaborative manner, in which staff talk to each other a lot, support each other, and work together, are likely to have receptive organizational cultures. These are usually programs where the director has readily shared information and decision-making power with the staff. Such programs are like ships with special radar. The radar detects the iceberg and steers clear of it. However, the ships now enter dangerous waters that harbor a hidden and treacherous iceberg. Only the most sophisticated radar can detect it hovering deep in the waters, waiting to pierce the bottom of the ship. This is the iceberg of mind set, which embraces the many assumptions, beliefs, and values about how the world works.

The Paradigm Iceberg

The third iceberg, the hardest to detect, is the mind set, or paradigm, iceberg. In this iceberg are the thinking patterns, attitudes, beliefs, and values that underlie the behavior of programs and practitioners. They often come into conflict with the assumptions underlying a process that embraces teamwork, cooperation, power sharing and learning together.

Thinking in terms of processes and systems, working in teams, and vesting power in practitioners throughout an organization are enormously difficult for most people. Most of us have learned to manage by meeting short-term numerical goals. We have not considered the capabilities of the system as a whole or the interrelationship of processes, especially as they relate to overall goals. Teamwork is not commonplace. Collaboration and cooperation are often undervalued and individual achievement championed over that of the group. The skills it takes to function successfully in a team, both as a member and as a leader, are frequently viewed as 'soft,' having

little to do with the real work of getting business done. Most of us are unfamiliar with and unskilled in consensus building, participatory decision-making, and all the other skills needed for teams to function effectively. Our intellectual training has promoted thinking in absolute categories and either-or terms, making us uncomfortable with ambiguity and confrontation. Our lack of skill and discomfort make us reluctant to give up old ways.

Other attitudes and beliefs important to embracing change have to do with what we think about motivation and power. A participatory planning process assumes internal motivation and the capacity of each practitioner to recognize and solve problems. It trusts that the resulting shifts in power will be of benefit to the organization. A deeply ingrained assumption in our culture, however, is that competition is a prime motivator. Just look at our schools' grading systems and assessment tests.

And then there are beliefs about power. The participatory planning process shifts the power in the organization from the top and spreads it throughout the organization. If a director believes there is only a finite amount of power in any given organization, then she is likely to resist letting go of that power. If a director believes that power grows as you give it away, the chances that a participatory planning process can take root are much higher.

One of the programs successfully cleared the first two icebergs but 'wrecked up' when it encountered the paradigm iceberg. The other program sailed the seas of the participatory planning into a new world of thinking, growing, and doing. This was a change-friendly organization that took risks to reach a vision of what it could be.

So...

What does this tell us about the organizational change process? How do we shift to being change-friendly? One way is to develop insight into why so many change efforts fail. We also need to recognize that complex change efforts are just plain hard. Recognizing the paradigm in an organization and the need to change it is big step in an organization's ability to plan and implement change effectively. Significant organizational and management changes may be needed to support the paradigm shift.

Shifting paradigms also helps us recognize that meaningful organizational change needs to be systemic and continuous. And, in change, loss and anxiety emerge around surrendering old and familiar ways. Linking change efforts to issues vital to the organization is one way for staff to see the benefits of the change in areas that have personal meaning for them. This is likely to reduce anxiety, but conflict and anger may erupt out of the stress that true change creates.

The process of organizational change is likely to be bumpy, difficult, and frustrating: a series of two steps forward and one step back. It needs to cut through barriers in our hearts and minds as well as in our organizations. But it does liberate us from addressing problems according to our prior approaches. It moves us from simply tinkering with the system to using our collective brainpower to make a difference in a world. The need to change is our constant companion. It may be hard, but it is always worthwhile.

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How Teachers Change

What will lead to change that most benefits student learning?

by Virginia Richardson

"Teachers don't change. They resist change. They just get in a groove of doing what they have always done and what they are comfortable with." The notion that teachers don't change does not match my experiences. I have been a teacher, a teacher-educator, a supervisor of student teaching, and a researcher, and have spent considerable time observing teachers in their classrooms. I have observed teachers in such diverse locations as Syracuse, NY; Tucson, AZ; Vancouver, British Columbia; Malawi; and Hong Kong. The teachers I worked with in these places were not teaching exactly the same way they did the previous year; nor do I as a teacher-educator. In fact, teachers change all the time.

Where, then, did the view come from that teachers resist change? And how can this view co-exist with the notion that teachers change all the time? This article explores the following thesis: The differences between these two views of teacher change may hinge on who is directing the change. Teachers often resist change mandated or suggested by others, but they do engage in change that they initiate: what I call voluntary change. In this article, I lay out and compare the two views of teacher change. I then examine two approaches to staff development, the training model and the reflective and collaborative model, and relate them to the differing views of teacher change. Finally, I suggest that the best teacher change is carried out in a way that involves teachers in the process, and promotes coherence among teachers in an organization. This article draws on my personal experiences, research that I have conducted, and the broader research literature. The literature I review is primarily focused on the K-12 system, but has much relevance for adult basic educators.

Change Hurts

As I looked into the literature on teacher change, the sentiment I found expressed was that teachers do not change, that change hurts and that is why people do not change, and that teachers are recalcitrant (e.g., Duffy & Roehler, 1986; Fullan, 1991). The literature suggests that teachers resist doing whatever is being proposed because they want to cling to their old ways. Change makes people feel uncomfortable.

This view of change in teaching practice dominated the educational literature until the early 1990s. It focuses on the failure of teachers to adopt teaching activities, practices, and curricula that are suggested or mandated by those who are external to the setting in which the teaching is taking place: administrators, policy-makers, and staff developers. The view of the teacher as reluctant to change is strong and widespread, and is one I have heard expressed by many teachers as well. It is promulgated by those who think they know what teachers should be doing in the classroom and are in a position to tell them what to do. In that sense, it relates to issues of power (e.g., Wasley, 1992). As pointed out by Morimoto (1973): "When change is advocated or demanded by another person, we feel threatened, defensive, and perhaps rushed. We are then without the freedom and the *time to understand and to affirm the* new learning as something desirable, and as something of our own choosing. Pressure to change, without an opportunity for exploration and choice, seldom results in experiences of joy and excitement in learning" (p. 255).

From the 'change hurts' perspective, 'teachers don't change' really means 'teachers aren't doing what I (or someone else) tell them to do.' As pointed out by Klein (1969) a number of years ago, "...studies of change appear to be taken from the perspective of those who are the change agents seeking to bring about change rather than of the clients they are seeking to influence" (p. 499). I felt that it was time to look at change from the standpoint of teachers themselves. Do they change? And if they do, why?

Voluntary Change

In my work with teachers, I noticed that they undertake change voluntarily, following their sense of what their students need and what is working. They try out new ideas. These changes, while often minor adjustments, can be dramatic (Richardson, 1990).

In a long-term collaborative study of teacher change, my colleagues and I found that when a teacher tries new activities, she assesses them on the basis of whether they work: whether they fit within her set of beliefs about teaching and learning, engage the students, and allow her the degree of classroom control she feels is necessary. If she feels the activity does not work, it is quickly dropped or radically altered (Richardson, 1994).

(Continued on page 81)

The decision as to whether a new activity works is often unconscious and may be based on experiences and understandings that are not relevant to the particular setting in which instruction is taking place. In other words, a teacher may try an activity that worked with another group of students and fail to notice that it is inappropriate for the new group. Thus, while voluntary change is what teachers actually do in their classrooms, it does not necessarily lead to exemplary teaching.

Laissez Faire?

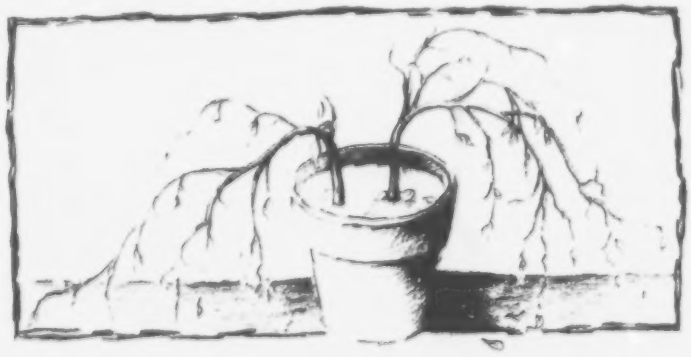
If teachers make voluntary changes all the time, perhaps they do not need help, direction, or encouragement to make change. According to Cuban (1988), the changes teachers make in their classrooms are minor and inconsequential. Therefore, one could argue that teachers need outside mandates and help to make major changes. This view can certainly be debated. We found that teachers sometimes do make major changes on their own (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell & Lloyd, 1991).

Teachers may, however, make decisions about change that are spur-of-the-moment and based on unwarranted assumptions. Without examining the beliefs underlying a sense of what does or does not work, teachers may perpetuate practices based on questionable assumptions and beliefs. This suggests that some direction would be helpful.

And, the question arises: do learners benefit from teachers acting alone, making changes as they see fit within the confines of their classrooms? If all teachers make decisions autonomously, the schooling of an individual student could be quite incoherent and ineffective. This, too, suggests that help, direction, or encouragement provided to staff rather than to individuals could be necessary to promote change that is valuable to the learner. I will come back to this later.

Vision of Teachers

Over the course of this century, our concept of teaching has shifted from an industrial model — teachers replicating a specific set of instructional tasks — to a "complex, dynamic, interactive, intellectual activity" (Smylie & Conyers, 1991, p. 13). This shift occurred for many reasons, including a change to a much more diverse student body (Devany & Sykes, 1988) and changes in our economy. We therefore need teachers who approach their work with a change orientation: an orientation that suggests that constant reflection, evaluation, and experimentation are integral elements of the teaching role. We now expect teachers to alter curricula on the basis of new knowledge and ways of knowing, to change styles of teacher-student interaction depending on needs of the student population, and to change methods when research indicates more effective practice.



This requires teachers who are inquirers, questioning assumptions and consciously thoughtful about goals, practices, and contexts. Gary Fenstermacher (1994) suggests that reflecting on one's work as a teacher must be undertaken within the framework of a clear sense of purpose in relation to the learner. He quotes Israel Scheffler's view of the purposes of education: "the formation of habits of judgment and the development of character, the elevation of standards, the facilitation of understanding, the development of taste and discrimination, the stimulation of curiosity and wonder, the fostering of style and sense of beauty, the growth of a thirst for new ideas and visions of the yet unknown" (Scheffler, 1976, p. 206).

Scheffler's notion of teacher, however, is quite individualistic. The autonomous, individual teacher works with her students in the classroom, and is reflective about what goes on in that classroom. As I suggested earlier, however, there is more to consider: the nature of the educational program through which students pass. The sense of teacher autonomy must be broadened beyond the individual teacher to the group of teachers who are working, over time, with a given student or set of students. Shirley Pendlebury (1990) suggests that we should think of schools or programs as communities of practice whose members are granted equal respect and concern. This requires an agreed-upon understanding of aims and purposes. Thus autonomy should be considered within a community of practice in which there is continual critical discussion about aims, standards, and procedures.

In sum, the description of the

teacher that I prefer is one that balances autonomy with community. The teacher is an inquirer, working within a community of practice in which fellow teachers engage, with each other, in critical discussions concerning aims, goals, procedures, and practices. How do we support change compatible with this? What staff development program permits the development of individual autonomy but also fosters a community of learners within a school or program? An examination of the staff development literature is helpful in addressing these questions.

Training Model

The more traditional form of staff development begins with someone from outside the school determining that a process, content, method, or system should be implemented in the classroom. The form of staff development most suitable for achieving change mandated by outside forces is the training model, which can be a deficit model. The training model has a clearly stated set of objectives and learner outcomes. These outcomes can be teaching skills, such as using learner-generated material or teaching critical thinking processes. Sparks & Loucks-Horsley (1990) identified a number of important assumptions inherent in the training model. Two of these assumptions are 1) that there are behaviors and techniques worthy of replication by teachers in the classroom, and 2) that teacher-education students and teachers can learn or change their behaviors to replicate these techniques in their classrooms (p. 241).

Many of the staff development programs that employ the training model are relatively short term, involving teachers in several hours or several days of workshops, with limited follow-up activities. Such programs have a chance of succeeding with those teachers whose beliefs match the assumptions inherent in the innovation; even these teachers might not try out the innovation. It is estimated that such staff development garners an implementation level of only 15 percent (Meyer, 1988).

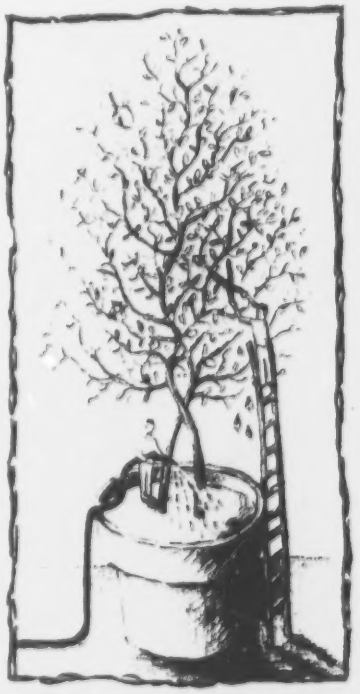
On the other hand, not all training models result in such limited change. A substantial body of research has identified characteristics of reasonably successful training models. These qualities have been summarized by many (e.g., Griffin, 1986) and include the following:

- The training process should be school-wide and context-specific.
- Principals (or program directors) should be supportive of the process and encouraging of change.
- The training should be long term, with adequate support and follow up.
- The training process should encourage collegiality.
- The training content should incorporate current knowledge obtained through well-designed research.
- The process should include adequate funds for materials, outside speakers, and substitute teachers to allow teachers to observe each other.

Even if the staff development process is successful as determined by the percentage of teacher participants who immediately implement changes in their classrooms, the longer-term effects of training models are questionable. For example, in a four-year study of a very popular staff development program, developed and conducted by Madeleine Hunter, which trained teachers in a structured approach to instruction, Stallings & Krasavage (1986) found that in the third year teachers implemented the desired behaviors much less often than they had in the first two years.

Several hypotheses are used to explain the disappointing long-term effects of Madeline Hunter's training model. One is the following: "We believe that the innovative practices teachers learn will not be maintained unless teachers and students remain interested and excited about their own learning... A good staff development program will create an excitement about learning to learn. The question is how to maintain momentum, not merely maintain previously learned behaviors" (Stallings & Krasavage, 1986, p. 137).

This leads to the question of long-term goals of these staff development programs. Do we want teachers to continue using a process, method, or approach into the distant future? Probably not. Many of us assume that something new and better will come along that will be more appropriate for teachers to use. This discussion of long-term goals leads to the second form of staff development. *(Continued on page 10)*



Reflective, Collaborative Models

The second form of staff development is designed to support the voluntary view of change described in the beginning of this article. It attempts to develop in teachers a more systematic and reflective approach to their own change process. Gallagher, Goudvis, and Pearson (1988) called the approach "mutual adaptation," which, they suggested, is the best approach to use to create dramatic change such as shifts in orientations and beliefs. An example of mutual adaptation is a program developed by Patricia Anders and myself (Richardson, 1994). This was a long-term process in which we met with teachers in groups and with individual teachers in their classrooms. We helped teachers explore their beliefs and practices through videotaping their classrooms, and talking about their practices with them while viewing the tape.[1] As staff developers, we did not have specific practices in mind that we wanted teachers to implement. Instead, we worked with teachers as they explored their own practices and determined their own directions for change. New practices were sometimes introduced by us in response to requests from the teachers, and often by other teachers. This process required time to meet, exposure to new practices, and time and opportunity to experiment with new practices and to reflect.

Reflective and collaborative staff development models such as the one in which we engaged have a set of similar characteristics. They are not based on a deficit model of change. They assume that reflection and change are on-going processes of assessing beliefs, goals, and results. They are designed to help develop and support a change orientation. The desired outcomes of such models are not pre-specified behaviors and skills. The purpose is procedural: to create an ecology of thinking, deliberation, and experimentation. The goals, therefore, may be unstated at the beginning of the process.

In these models, change is not consider to be static. That is, a change made by a teacher during the staff development process may not be in place the next year. In fact, it is hoped that teachers will continue to change after completing the staff development. Each teacher is free to follow her own lines of inquiry and change. The group is not necessarily expected to decide on the same change. The outcomes of interest are not just changes in behaviors and actions, but also changes in the rationale and justifications that accompany the new practices. Thus, a measure of success is the degree to which teachers take responsibility for their actions,[2] assume ownership of their practices, and are able to articulate these actions and their justifications to another person.

Over the three-year period in which we worked with teachers in this way, the teachers changed their beliefs and practices in directions that related to the various dialogues we had with them. Many of them, for example, moved away from the textbook or basal approach to teaching reading toward the use of literature. Bos & Anders (1994) evaluated our project and found that the students of the teachers who participated in the staff development process achieved more in certain aspects of reading comprehension than did the students in contrast classrooms. In a follow up two years later, we found that the teachers had continued to engage in reflective change (Valdez, 1992). It would appear that the teachers had developed a change orientation that led them to reflect continually on their teaching and classrooms, and experiment thoughtfully with new practices. The teachers had become confident in their decision-making abilities and took responsibility for what was happening in their classrooms. Thus they had developed a strong sense of individual autonomy and felt empowered to make deliberate and thoughtful changes in their classrooms.

While the reflective and collaborative model of staff development works well with individual teachers, it does have the possibility of creating, within a given program, a number of effective, autonomous, change-oriented teachers who have very different beliefs about what should be taught and how. A student progressing through the program may become very confused with these different approaches. How can we shift elements of this approach to these considerations?

Community of Practice

What is necessary is the creation of a sense of autonomy and responsibility that goes beyond the individual class and moves to the school, program, and community levels. Judith Warren Little (1992) describes this as civic responsibility, but cautions against "formally orchestrated" collaboration that becomes bureaucratic and contrived. Little suggests that a solution to the individual autonomy versus civic responsibility tension is the development of "joint work" that brings teachers together and creates interdependence among them.

One way of bringing teachers in a program together in a non-bureaucratic and unforced way is to focus attention on what happens to students over the course of their program or school career. Our current approach to testing and assessment is cross-sectional and grade- or classroom-level based. This tends to focus administrators' and teachers' attention on the individual classroom or grade level rather than the

institution. If we concentrate on what happens to students as they move through a program, the focus for teachers might shift from the students in their classroom to students within their program. This shifts responsibility, in part, to the collective, and requires consideration of both individual and organizational change. Teacher autonomy would not, then, be an individual right and responsibility, but would be earned and assumed within a community of practice.

Conclusion

My interest in teacher change grew out of what appeared to be two competing concepts. One proposed that teachers resist change, and the other, based on my own experiences as a teacher, teacher educator, and teacher observer, suggested that teachers change all the time. My inquiry into this discrepancy was part of a movement that led to ways of thinking about teacher change as a voluntary process, and to staff development programs that take advantage of the voluntary nature of change. I discovered, however, that these staff development approaches may lead to an individually autonomous change process and thereby to incoherent educations for students. The suggestion I have arrived at so far is that the individualistic and empowering form of staff development be extended to the group level, involving all teachers in a given school or program. In such communities, individual members are granted equal respect and concern, but the focus is on developing and agreeing upon the longitudinal goals and concerns for all students as they pass through the various classes in the school or program.

Endnotes

1. This aspect of the staff development program relied on a form of dialogue called Practical Arguments (Fenstermacher, 1994).

2. At the beginning of the study, many teachers suggested that the practices they used in the classroom were dictated by forces outside the classroom, e.g., "I use the basals in teaching reading because the School Board insists on it." Following the staff development, very few teachers' statements attributed their practices to forces outside the classroom. The practices were justified by their own beliefs and understandings of the classroom and of teaching.

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Dinosaurs and Upstarts: Organizational Change at CASA Latina

When staff turnover is high, how can a capacity for change be cultivated?

by Hilary Stern

"I don't want to sound defensive. It's not that I think everything is perfect the way it is now, but we have to look critically at the student suggestions. We can't implement them all." I couldn't believe those words were coming from me. But actually, I was feeling defensive. As far as the staff was concerned, the whole program was up for negotiation.

We were discussing the results of a series of student focus groups. Thinking about what the learners had said, one person suggested that we change our classroom arrangement to rows of desks facing the teacher so that students could hear the teacher better and not be distracted by their neighbors. I dismissed this idea as contrary to our philosophical approach to popular education. Another staff member suggested that we add a conversation program. We had tried that four years ago and, besides, the public library located a few blocks from us now has a conversation program. Why not just send our students to them? I had an argument for every new suggestion. Was I becoming a dinosaur, resistant to change?

Five years after having co-founded CASA Latina, I am the old-timer here. I have seen our community-based organization, which is committed to educating and organizing the Latino seasonal worker population that lives in urban Seattle, grow from the dream of a small group of activists into an institution. Our education programs now reach more than 700 people a year and include English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes for adults and children, family literacy, and theater of the oppressed workshops. We also run an entrepreneurial business program.

Turnover

High turnover is a common phenomenon in many adult basic education (ABE) programs, whether it results from the use of volunteers, AmeriCorps members, unstable funding, or part-time, poorly paid staff. CASA Latina is no different. Most of the people who work here are AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps is a national service corps begun just five years ago. In exchange for a year of service, members receive a living allowance of $700 a month and an educational award of almost $5,000 to be used to pay for higher education. This puts them in a difficult economic situation, ameliorated only slightly by the fact that it is temporary. Therefore, every fall, we have experienced a complete turnover in staff as five new AmeriCorps members replace their predecessors.

"Why was the staff promoting organizational change, while I was the one putting on the brakes?"

Every new team of AmeriCorps members begins their year of service with a refreshing burst of energy. They are excited about the work and see many possibilities for developing the programs at CASA Latina. As the year wears on, their savings diminish and they start fashioning their post-AmeriCorps plans. New projects at work become the last thing they want to spend their time on.

Last spring, five of our seven full-time workers were going to leave in a few months. Those leaving were in the process of withdrawing from their jobs, psychologically as well as professionally, tying up loose ends and documenting their knowledge for their successors. They did not want anything new thrown their way, anything that would require new efforts. For example, we had been given the opportunity to fill a new position earlier than we had planned, and I suggested that we do it. Emotions in our staff meeting ran high. The AmeriCorps members complained that they could not handle any new projects. They felt that they were overworked already. Adding another person and another project — in this case, rewriting the curriculum for the intermediate ESOL class — would create more work for everyone. Never mind that the purpose of the project was to save them work while increasing the quality of our classes.

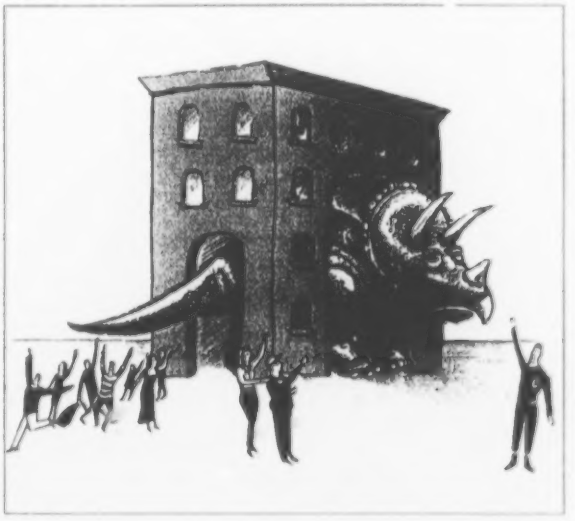
They were so stressed that anything new seemed like a threat. The long-term impact of a new project did not really matter to them because they were not going to be here. The staff, almost all about to turn over, was resistant to change.

This year, why were the roles reversed? Why was the staff promoting organizational change, while I was the one putting on the brakes? I have a reputation for being a person who has more ideas than anyone could possibly implement. What had happened?

Uphill Battle

The acronym CASA in CASA Latina stands for Centro de Ayuda Solidaria a los Amigos, which means Center for Help in Solidarity with Friends. We work with people who are in distress: immigrants who are poor, homeless, and exploited. Most of the individuals we help will never be able to solve their own problems unless changes occur in the social structures that keep them poor. We are often discouraged by the immensity of our students' problems and by the numbers of people waiting to be helped. We get frustrated by not being able to fix the world all by ourselves.

Last year, in addition to almost total staff turnover, we did not have a mechanism through which we could air our frustrations. This year, I changed our class schedule so that we now hold classes four mornings a week instead of five. On Fridays, we close down to the public and meet as a staff to reflect on the larger purpose of our work as well to talk about our day-to-day frustrations. We leave our offices and go to a nearby cafe for a couple of hours. Our reflection meetings have included journal writing, open-ended discussion of our feelings and reflections on the week, discussions of an article or a chapter of a book, role plays as spokespeople for immigrant rights, and rehearsals of presentations to be given to our board of directors. These reflection meetings have not only made us more single-minded in our understanding of the purpose of our work, they have drawn us closer together as a staff. We are considerate of each other, we like each being with each other, we want to help each other out. This collective support makes us stronger as a organization and more open to taking on the risks of organizational change.



Staffing a program with volunteers or with AmeriCorps members will never result in a stable workforce. AmeriCorps members can only stay two years, at maximum. This year, however, only two of our nine full-time workers are leaving; most AmeriCorps members are signing on for a second year. Since most of the staff are staying, organizational progress does not have to stop. This year, the staff is promoting organizational change because they have a developed a shared vision through our weekly reflection meetings and because most of them will be here to follow through on plans for change. Now, the question remains: Why am I, the director of the organization, resisting change?

Old Timer

As the old timer here, I am the only one who has lived through all of the changes and growth this organization has experienced. I am becoming impatient with all of these youngsters — regardless of their ages — who think they are discovering our problems for the first time. It seems as if I am having the same conversations over and over again, but each time with different people who have even less of a sense of the history of CASA Latina, of solutions tried but abandoned.

I know the only way to reduce this feeling is to have less turnover. To do that, I need more paid staff positions, and a nurturing, challenging work environment where people are supported in doing important work. One of our AmeriCorps members is staying on as a paid staff member because I was able to raise enough money to fund one more full-time position. Next year, two members who are staying on will leave unless I can find more funding to fund their positions.

I dream about a staff that has little turnover. I imagine that together we could follow through on all of our grand schemes and really make things work, instead of making changes that get half lost with the next generation of workers who start all over again. But if we had all been here since the beginning, would we all start to feel the same way that I sometimes feel: that I've worked

hard enough, made enough improvements, and now want to enjoy the fruits of my labors? I'm afraid that we might. We need those upstarts who have little sense of our history to question the status quo and make us defend and rethink our programs.

Three Ingredients

I am realizing that, for an organization to remain responsive and flexible, it must have three important ingredients. First, it needs regular time set aside for collective reflection and vision making. It also needs the stability of long-term workers who can see the change through and understand it within the context of the organizational history. And, last, it needs an influx of new energy from people who are not necessarily invested in maintaining the status quo.

CASA Latina has that magical mix this year. I hope that we are on the way to having it in the future, as I fund more and more positions and realign our ratio of temporary volunteers to permanent staff. In the meantime, I can build community over and over again so that we are able to push forward a little more each year.

About the Author

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Web Site

Visit CASA Latina via their web site at: www.casa-latina.org

A Story of Improvement

An honest look told this literacy program they were not as good as they might be. It was time to listen to stakeholders and institute a continuous improvement process.

by Jane Cody, James Ford, and Kathleen Hayward

"The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order..."

— Alfred North Whitehead

Looking in the mirror, really taking a long, hard look, can be unnerving, even depressing. We see the blemishes that we hide with makeup. We see the bald spots that we cover by creatively combing our hair. We see the ten extra pounds that age has brought. Most of us avoid the problem by not looking, or we take a quick glance to make sure we are properly buttoned and zipped and ready to appear in public. Perhaps we make a silent resolution about dieting or exercising, but that's about it. After all, we're not perfect.

This is pretty normal human behavior and it carries over into our professional lives. After operating an adult literacy program for many years, it is easy to avoid taking a long, hard look in the mirror. Students come, money comes, programs expand, people say "well done," everything seems pretty good not perfect, but pretty good.

This is the story of an adult literacy program that decided that merely glancing in the mirror was no longer enough. It is a story of shock of discovering a lack of clearly defined standards and the tools to measure progress toward them. It is a story of hope, in finding a process to identify program gaps and narrow them. It is also a story of improvement, through the systematic use of stakeholder input, hard data, and detailed analysis. It is a story, not about perfection, but about getting better.

Our Organization

Adult and family literacy programs in Knox County, Tennessee, are provided by a unique public/private partnership. The public member is the Knox County School System and, specifically, its Adult Basic Education Department (ABED). The private member is a nonprofit corporation called Friends of Literacy, Inc. (FOL), which was formed in 1991 to supplement — by way of money and volunteers — the resources that ABED had for literacy programs. Through the balance of this article, "we" refers to this FOL/ABED Partnership, to the program it produces, and to its combined leadership.

Most knowledgeable observers would have described this as a successful partnership with high-caliber programs. Funding grew each year, students provided ample anecdotal evidence that we made a difference in their lives, and we had achieved some national recognition

We considered ourselves anything but static. We had changed our curriculum, improved our volunteer training, and added more paid teachers. Our program had grown to approximately 400 students, 15 paid staff, and 40 volunteers. We were doing something right.

Forces for Change

In 1996, FOL had its fifth birthday. Its budget had grown from $5,000 in 1991 to more than $150,000 in fiscal year '96-'97. It had evolved from an organization that provided money and people to an adult literacy program operated by ABED to one that was also the primary management and fiscal agent for its own family literacy program. It was time to take a look at where FOL, the Adult Literacy Program, and the partnership were going. As luck would have it, new members had just been added to the FOL board of directors. These members had not grown up with the organization and, consequently, viewed it from a different perspective. One new member had expertise in strategic planning. A committee composed of FOL board members and program staff reviewed and clarified the vision, mission, and values of FOL.

In addition, the FOL/ABED partnership had been selected to participate in a national project entitled "What Works Literacy Partnership" (WWLP). WWLP sparked our thinking, in a more detailed way, about how we could document the results we thought we were achieving in improving the basic academic skills of our students. We started to concentrate on how could we prove that our program really did what we said it did.

Dovetailing with WWLP was another national initiative entitled "Equipped for the Future" (EFF). The FOL/ABED partnership was selected to be one of several pilot test sites for EFF. Like WWLP, one aspect of EFF focused on the question of how we measure results.

Two other critical pieces fell into place during the summer of 1997. First, to help us with the WWLP project, we hired a new staff member who just happened to be a Certified Quality Examiner for the State of Tennessee (more about this below). Second, FOL received a generous gift to purchase new hardware and a software system to manage data about students, volunteers, and donors. With all this going on, we had both the courage to look in the mirror and some ideas about how to take a systematic approach to dealing with what we saw there.

New Approach

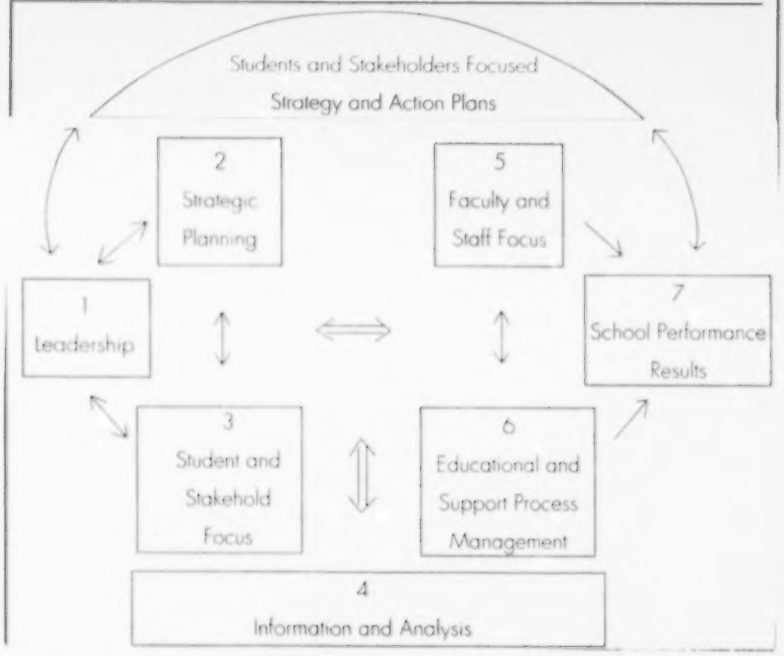
Our new staff member introduced us to the Malcolm Baldridge Educational Criteria for Performance Excellence (see Figure 1, next page). These criteria take the total quality management principles originally used in the private sector and apply them to educational institutions. They provide an orderly approach to continually improving the operations and results of an educational enterprise. This was the systematic approach we would use.

The starting point was to identify the needs of the customers: in this case, our students. FOL/ABED program leadership instituted monthly "Town Meetings" to ask students what they wanted, needed, and expected from our adult literacy program. Approximately 75 students attended each of the meetings. We got a wide range of responses, from better parking to more computer time and more volunteers for individual tutoring. Next, we asked teachers and volunteers, who are key stakeholders in the program, what they expected and how we could all work together to improve things. Better training and more support from the leadership were two answers. This group also developed its own vision, mission, and value statements for both adult and family literacy program components. These built on similar work completed earlier by FOL and the Knox County Schools, but were the work of these stakeholders, and were something they could commit to as their own. The FOL board also brainstormed its role and the expectations of and for each board member. Some consistent themes were emerging, one of which was better communication among the stakeholder groups: students, teachers, volunteers, and board members.

We wanted to use this information to develop quality standards for our organization and program. We were fortunate: adult literacy educators in both Tennessee and New York had already adopted "Indicators of Program Quality" that fit nicely into the Baldridge Criteria and our own vision, mission, and values. For example, Quality Indicators One and Two of the New York program stress the involvement of all stakeholders in the development of program philosophy and direction. Quality Indicators Three and Five underscore the importance of measuring student improvements in reading, writing, speaking, and problem solving, and highlight the goal of enabling students to be better workers, parents, and citizens. These Indicators were consistent with our approach in the EFF project. Indicators Seven and Eight set benchmarks for the recruitment, orientation, placement, and retention of students. We felt comfortable with all 13 Quality Indicators and adopted them as standards by which to measure our own work.

Measuring progress towards benchmarks and ultimate program results are critical concepts in the Baldridge Criteria. We realized that we must start "managing by facts" rather than by assumptions or

Figure 1: Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence Framework: A Systems Perspective



guesswork. We set about the task of collecting and analyzing data in several ways. First, program management went back into the classroom to see what actually happened there on a daily basis. They resumed the role of teacher to see, firsthand, the problems of taking our curriculum from training manual to actual delivery. They also observed other teachers to determine whether the material covered during in-service training was actually being incorporated. These were eye-opening experiences. What we thought was happening in the classroom was not always occurring. Some of the curriculum was unwieldy or too complex. It was not always well integrated between teachers in different classrooms. In our family literacy program, for example, the curriculum used by those teaching the parents was not well linked with that used to teach the children. Teachers provided input to help redesign curriculum areas that were not working.

We needed better data on actual student performance, so we changed to a more accurate instrument that provides diagnostic information to the student and the teacher. We tested adult learners using the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) when they first enrolled in our program, and again after completing 100 hours of classroom instruction. We collected, analyzed, and fed data back to both teachers and students. We use this information to develop specific, individualized action plans for improvement by each adult learner. At last we had reliable, hard data to show us whether our students were making academic progress.

As we were gathering data, a "think tank" of program managers, teachers, and FOL board members began to identify the "vital few" core drivers of our partnership and literacy programs. Core drivers are what we have to do well to meet the indicators of a quality program. They included student recruitment and retention, volunteer management, financial management (raising and spending money), and bringing our new data system up to speed. The group examined how we operated in each of these areas, set sights on a higher standard for future performance, and developed detailed action plans for improvement. For example, we knew our data system was critical to managing by fact. Without a better system, we could not record and analyze data on student test results. Neither could we keep track of who had given us money, when, how much, and for what purpose. We solicited input from everyone who had to use the data system, asking, "What are the problems with current operations and how could they be improved?" We selected a point person to deal with the software company in redesigning some elements of the system, based upon this input, and we established a timetable for improvement.

Shock, Hope, Improvement

The Baldridge criteria require an organization to slow down and rebuild with a focus towards customer and program results that matter. The criteria link and create an alignment between all internal operations, organization leadership, systems, and processes as well as sound literacy standards. When we first began our critical look, many of us confidently believed that, on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the best, we would be about an eight. Wrong. Systematic feedback, data collection, and analysis, as described above, showed some real gaps in our operations. For example, teachers told us that the continuous enrollment of new students — on whatever day they happened to show up — was a real barrier to success. It required teachers to interrupt classes to assess new students and try to

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bring them up to speed. Students told us that it was intimidating to be assigned to a classroom without any idea of what to expect upon arrival. The solution, devised with input from the stakeholders, was a new class, called Learning Skills, in which each new student is enrolled for a month before assignment to a regular class. Our TABE test results indicate that students who attended the Learning Skills class are progressing more quickly than those who were enrolled in our program prior to development of this class. In addition, since students graduate from Learning Skills at the end of the month, teachers in regular classes enroll new students only once a month and have benchmarks for them before they arrive. See the box for a description of this class.

Teacher training was another area that needed to be addressed. We found that teachers were not incorporating in-service material in their classrooms. We asked them for help in revising classroom curriculum, and we changed our training focus from 'putting on a workshop' to meeting the needs of the staff. In addition, our EFF implementation allowed us to bring together teachers who worked in different parts of our program. Lack of funding for teacher planning time had been a significant barrier to this in the past. Adult literacy teachers linked up with family literacy teachers. Staff began exchanging ideas and method; they brainstormed to solve problems. When asked to evaluate this year upon its completion in June, 1998, teachers were significantly more positive about the program, and their role in it, than they had been in the past.

We also saw another significant change during the year. We had tried several times in the past to develop a leadership group from within the student body. Efforts had always failed. This year, they blossomed. Several students volunteered to serve on a Leadership Council that tackled some successful projects. Why the difference? The projects were those that mattered to the students. Their input drove the leadership group's agenda. The students on the Leadership Council took data from the Town Meetings and also surveyed students about project priorities, using the information to chose items to tackle first. The initial project created a student eating area. Members of the Council used a quality improvement tool to plan and then establish this new space. They also described their process and results at an FOL Board meeting. The next project, still underway, is recycling aluminum cans to raise money to open an on-site store where students can buy paper, pens, and other school supplies. The evidence is anecdotal but, nevertheless, important. Students exhibited a greater sense of community and program ownership than in past years. While 'student-centered' has always been important to our partnership, we found a new way to put it into practice.

Our testing program produced data showing that our students are improving their reading, writing, spelling, and math skills. Preliminary results indicate that students gained an average of one grade level in each of these areas after 100 hours of classroom instruction. These data have helped us to identify strong teaching techniques and discard the less effective. The information has been heartening to students and teachers, who have objective evidence that their work is paying off. It has also been helpful in fundraising, since we can show prospective donors that investing in our programs will get results. We have more credibility with these data, and are more competitive.

(continued on page 18)

The Learning Skills Class

The Learning Skills class was developed in response to problems identified by teachers and students. Each new student is enrolled in the Learning Skills class for a month. During this time, we test him or her to determine an appropriate grade assignment. We prepare students for the reality of coming back to school, and provide them with tools — organization, listening, and note-taking skills, for example — to increase their chances for success. We help each student understand how she learns effectively — for example, visually or auditorily — and we introduce concepts such as goal setting and critical thinking. Each student researches a topic of her choice and presents that research to the class. Students learn to use some of the quality improvement tools we are using throughout the organization. We teach the Shewhart Continuous Improvement Cycle as a means of setting and achieving a goal. In the first step of this cycle, a student plans what he needs to do to accomplish a particular goal. Next, the student does those tasks. The student studies the completed tasks, determines whether the goal has been met, and, if not, revises the task list to get closer to the objective. The fourth step is to take action on the revised task list.

After graduating from Learning Skills, students enroll in regular classes.

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(Continued from page 17)

Reflections

There is an old saying: "It's more important to be lucky than good." We knew we had been lucky, and we thought we had been good. But we wanted to be better. We decided that good intentions, luck, and ad hoc methods had taken us as far as we could go. We could no longer excuse our shortcomings by saying that ours was a 'fluid' or 'dynamic' environment, or one that was underfunded, implying that somehow our expectations should be lower as a result. It was time for accountability and documented results through systematic program improvement.

This has been a re-education for all of us. The vocabulary, which comes from the business sector, is new to us. The process can also be discouraging, especially at the beginning when scrutiny revealed some things we would rather not have seen. Indeed, when our Think Tank sat down to identify the "vital few" areas to address first, we came up with a list of "vital many" and had difficulty prioritizing where to start.

Commitment

This process requires the belief that it will work as well as the commitment of time to think, plan, and involve students, staff, board members, and volunteers. All of these groups have been involved and supportive. The Baldridge Framework is a very logical approach, built on common sense. For those of us geared toward instant results, it has sometimes been frustrating to slog through the tedious process of documenting, in detail, the way we do things (our "as is" state) versus the way we should do things (our desired state). It is time consuming and requires discipline. Just recently, three staff and one board member spent an hour discussing and writing down the process we will use to handle receipts and expenditure. Now we have a simple procedure that everyone involved has agreed upon. It replaces a hit-and-miss method that no one understood. The people involved had to learn process charting and develop this particular chart in addition to their other duties, not in place of them. If the investment of time produces a better process that, in turn, produces better results — in this instance, fewer mistakes, less confusion and duplication of effort, more reliable financial data — then it will save future time and effort. We do not worry about getting so wrapped up in process charting that we forget the ultimate goal is to achieve results in student performance, because student feedback and student testing helps keep us focused.

Our world is more complex now because we understand how the various parts of our program are interrelated. All our staff and volunteers need to be open to change and to soliciting and receiving feedback. If we have used customer input to design the process, and measured and analyzed both customer satisfaction and results along the way, we should arrive at our goal. If we do not, we have a good idea of what went wrong so that we can improve the next time around. We now understand that orderly is not synonymous with bureaucratic.

We have a long way to go. In the coming year, we will be working hard to bring the ABED and FOL leadership further on board. Although both have been supportive, both groups need a better understanding of the significant organizational implications of this continuous improvement process. We will be implementing more fully our EFF curriculum. We will continue work on our action plans for the "vital few" and document our progress toward improvement.

Deciding to improve the performance of an organization in an orderly, comprehensive, systematic way is analogous to an individual deciding to lose the ten pounds that a stop in front of the mirror revealed. It entails hard work, discipline, incremental results, motivation through small victories and, most importantly, a change in lifestyle. Just as a fad diet does not produce long-term success in weight reduction, 'fad quality' is not the answer for improving performance over time. An organization must live and breathe quality and incorporate it as a cultural value in everything that it does. We have only begun that process, but, as the saying goes, "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

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Editorial Board

Issue C: September 1998

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Facilitating Inquiry-Based Staff Development

While helping teachers to change, staff developers must be open to changing, too.

by Jereann King

I got involved in inquiry-based staff development and practitioner research during the early 90's as part of my work with Literacy South. A non-profit organization, Literacy South was founded in 1987 to improve the quality of adult literacy services in the Southeast through a combination of professional development in participatory literacy practices, collaborative research and evaluation, and advocacy for participatory programs. Inquiry-based staff development is a process in which practitioners come together with colleagues over a period of time to systematically explore issues, questions, or problems emerging in their work. The framework for organizing inquiry-based staff development can differ from context to context, but always involves reflecting on practice, formulating problem statements, taking new action or trying out new approaches, and evaluating their effectiveness. In theory, inquiry-based staff development, like learner-centered, participatory adult literacy, is about respecting experience, culture, knowledge; it is about sharing power and taking new actions. It is a way of learning that places practitioners and their practice at the center of the learning process. This article is about the tensions and contradictions I experienced facilitating a practitioner-inquiry-as-staff-development project.

In 1995, with funding from the UPS Foundation, Literacy South initiated the Georgia Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Network (GALPIN). We mailed out a project brochure and application form to literacy providers in community-based programs and community colleges around the state. The application form asked applicants to describe how they saw themselves moving toward more learner-centered practice, the major challenges they faced in their work, and the experiences they had had in program development projects. We asked these questions because we wanted to put together a group that shared our commitment to learner-centered and participatory work. We learned from the applications that potential participants had a wide range of teaching experiences, very little program development experience, and varying definitions of what it means to be learner centered.

From a small applicant pool, we made our selections and put together a group of 18 participants (13 women, five men, six African Americans, 12 European Americans) from diverse literacy settings in mostly rural communities in Georgia. We planned and implemented a series of retreats and meetings over a year's time. The five retreats took participants through a process of reflection, taking action, and more reflection. The practitioners investigated challenges they regularly face in their adult literacy practices. I was the coordinator and co-facilitator of the project.

Five Retreats

The first retreat, "Becoming Researchers," included community-building activities to help participants learn more about each other, their work, and the communities they served. The main focus was introducing the research process and how we expected the GALPIN project to unfold. Participants spent time looking at the problems that confronted them in their programs. Working in groups, they developed problem statements and questions to guide their investigations. They left the retreat with an assignment to gather what we called a 'data slice' of their classroom or program life. The purpose was to validate or add new information to the problems or issues they wanted to investigate.

At the second retreat, participants refined their problem statements and research questions. They taught each other various data collection techniques, such as journaling, observing, interviewing, triangulation, and surveying. Returning to the third retreat, "Listening for the Story," with mounds of data, they began the process of making sense of it by coding and analyzing it. In the last two retreats, "Sharing the Research Experience" and "Telling the Story," participants presented what they had discovered during their research projects and worked on how to best capture in written form their research experience. At the last meeting, participants talked about the importance of the GALPIN experience to them both personally and professionally. *(continued on page 20)*

"In theory, I wanted to follow participatory principles. I wanted participants to freely design their projects and follow their own paths to discovery. In practice, however, I had in mind definite outcomes for how they would change and improve their work"

(Continued from page 19)

While the project was successful overall, I experienced a dilemma common to participatory work: How to honor and build on participants' experiences, background, and culture while pushing my own agenda? Several issues surfaced for me during the GALPIN project concerning my personal values, requiring that I analyze critical issues in greater depth.

Different Cultures

Staff development projects are driven by the values and philosophies of both participants and facilitators; a set of norms, explicit or not, is always operating. I think of this as the 'culture of staff development.' In the early stages of the GALPIN project, most participants would have liked us, the facilitators, to tell them what to think and what to do. We wanted the project activities and the retreats to be participant centered, and we encouraged active engagement in dialogue and reflection. This approach was new for our group, which seemed to be more comfortable with a directive approach. Our way made for what some group members referred to as 'touchy-feely' situations. It reminded me of my work in the adult literacy classroom, when students resisted being placed in roles of generators of knowledge: not wanting to examine their own experiences for answers, but rather to have answers from me, the teacher. With the GALPIN group, I felt pressured to be an expert. When I resisted that role, I felt uneasy.

Most of the practitioners in inquiry groups I had facilitated in the past brought a political perspective to their work. This group felt different. Besides wanting more 'expert-driven' learning structures, they seemed to ignore or not bring forth the racial, economic, and social factors of their students' lives into our discussions. For example, participants rarely made reference to their students being mostly African American women, poor, and from other marginalized groups. For me, bringing issues of gender, class race and power into the discussion was essential. This omission showed me that the way I viewed adult literacy education was very different from how most of the project participants viewed it.

Where some participants situated their problems during many of the early discussions and in their initial problem statements also stood out for me. They blamed many of the challenges they experienced in their work on their students and their students' lack of self-esteem and motivation. My ideas about self-esteem and motivation were different.

Also, many of the communities with whom GALPIN participants work hold adult education in low regard and the GALPIN group realize it. The communities are often poor, rural, and offer very few opportunities for residents with low literacy skills to improve themselves through better employment. Many of the employers and industry owners in these communities have no hope of being able to offer higher wages for higher-skilled or better-educated workers. So, consequently, residents who could benefit from adult education programs have little incentive to even participate or get involved. Again, my ideas about what this meant for literacy work differed from those of the group with whom I was working.

Theory vs. Practice

In theory, I wanted to follow participatory principles. I wanted participants freely to design their projects and follow their own paths to discovery. In practice, however, I had in mind definite outcomes for how they would change and improve their work. I was often stymied by what I thought was narrow and non-critical analysis by the group, and was even more frustrated with my own lack of ability to structure activities creatively to unearth new analysis. I was frustrated, too, because I wanted participants to view their practices through learner-centered and participatory lenses and use language common to my experience. Was I really meeting them where they were, which is a tenet of learner-centered work?

The struggle was exacerbated by the restrictions of time. The retreats were only two full days each and we had to be pragmatic in deciding what support and structure we could offer participants so they could complete their projects. Activities to examine

philosophical and political issues seemed to be ancillary to the process. I had to come to grips with my own expectations and make some adjustments in our process.

In an attempt to broaden critical analysis, during our second retreat we held after-dinner discussion groups. The first discussion was organized around an article on literacy and community economic development. The second discussion was on stereotypes of adults with literacy barriers. These discussions provided a platform for a critical examination of issues in adult education and helped me to feel more comfortable expressing some of my ideas. By our fourth retreat, when participants presented their projects, we were all more comfortable sharing our opinions and drawing on our experiences and appreciated learning from each other. The participants were certainly more willing to engage in deeper discussions and take a more critical look at some of the issues than they had in the first meeting. Despite my discomfort, the process seemed to have worked.

Next Time

I learned some important lessons about how to encourage reflective thinking and critical analysis from the GALPIN project. Our views of adult literacy education are often clouded by media stereotypes of learners and their experiences. It is therefore important in a staff development setting to provide opportunities for participants to examine critically assumptions and values about education in general, and adult literacy education specifically. Adult literacy practitioners often feel isolated in their practices; when given an opportunity to spend time with their peers, they simply want to talk. Those chat sessions can provide natural ways in which to move into more structured activities such as reading and discussing journal articles, student writing, and various other texts. These activities can then serve as a springboard into deeper analysis of adult literacy challenges and dilemmas. In the future I will try this out.

As a facilitator, I have to consider participants' previous experiences and the values and norms they bring to practitioner research. What are their expectations about group process, community building, examining assumptions? These are all important to consider in planning any kind of staff development process, but especially in one that is participatory and inquiry based. I will ask these questions more explicitly in future projects.

If I want practitioners to become more learner-centered and participatory, then I think it is important for them, regardless of their particular research question, to understand what I think of as the fundamentals of learner-centered, participatory adult literacy education. I will devote more time to this. This would give them a framework for thinking about and designing their projects.

Planning and facilitating practitioner research is not easy. As facilitators, we, too, have to examine our assumptions about group process and what it means to push for deeper reflection and critical analysis among participants. Throughout the GALPIN project, I found myself reflecting on my experience in the ABE class, asking questions like "Is this process learner centered? In what ways are we creating opportunities for participatory learning? Am I staying grounded in what I know?" And finally, "How do the answers to these questions have an impact on whether participants are successful as practitioner researchers?"

Somewhere and somehow in the mix of all of this, I will pay much closer attention to moving participants into generalizing principles from all of their research discoveries and thinking about how these principles translate or transfer into their adult literacy education practices. I will also encourage practitioners to examine their discoveries with an eye to the policy implication for the larger adult education system, as I will continue to examine mine.

About the Author

Jereann King is Director of Programs at Literacy South, responsible for staff development programs with practitioners in publicly funded adult literacy and ESOL programs. In addition, she works with staff in community organizations to assist them with incorporating literacy development into their community work. She also loves quilts and quilting ❖

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An Unexpected Outcome

No lightning flashed. No light bulbs blinked on. Change was not my intent. It is difficult to remember when I first realized that a change was taking place. I do know that my beliefs about teaching ESOL were not the same as they were eight months ago...

by Edith Cowper

This story begins when Literacy South, an adult literacy research and staff development organization, obtained a grant for the North Carolina adult English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) Curriculum Framework Inquiry Project. They decided to work with ESOL instructors from Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh, North Carolina, because Wake Tech holds its ESOL classes in sites accessible to students, such as churches and high schools, in addition to on campus. The diversity of the ESOL student population was also appealing to Literacy South.

Of about 75 Wake Tech ESOL instructors, 15, myself included, applied to carry out the curriculum framework inquiry project with the goal of developing guiding principles for adult ESOL practitioners in North Carolina. Following an initial weekend retreat, the project group met monthly. In addition, we each did an inquiry project related to our practice to explore the teaching beliefs that guided each of us. Then, we presented our individual project findings to each other. Out of our research, inquiry, and reflection, we developed a shared vision of how best to serve our learners. From this we formulated our guiding principles: the foundation of our framework.

My Goals

When I applied to participate in this project I was an ESOL instructor, but by the first meeting I was working as an ESOL coordinator. My new role as supervisor included hiring, training, and observing teachers. I was actually the supervisor of some of the teachers who were participating in the project. I felt I must be a good role model for the teachers with whom I worked. In addition, I wanted to provide quality input to the group.

We began our project by reviewing our own language learning experiences and discussing some of our teaching beliefs. We also had quiet time for reflective writing. In my journal I noted, "All this reflection does make me question some of my own learning and teaching, which is a good thing, but not always easy to swallow sometimes. I'm frustrated that I'm not doing all these things in the classroom, but want to learn how to be better. The big question for me is how can I best use this info for my current position: more as a teacher trainer. How can I train when I'm not an 'expert' teacher myself and don't incorporate everything in my own teaching? It presents a new challenge..."

We talked a lot about using a learner-centered philosophy. I thought I had utilized one in my own teaching practice. Through reading and discussion, we settled on Huerta-Macias' (1993) definition of learner-centered as the one that reflected our views. She defines it as an approach that "involves collaboration between teachers and learners; through ongoing dialogue, they determine the content of the curriculum and the learning objectives. This approach focuses on learners' real-life needs..."

I began to realize that I was not as learner-centered as I thought. I had used many participatory activities. One, for example, was a lesson I used for "ed" (walked, talked, for example) pronunciation practice. I gave students cards of regular past tense verbs and asked them, in pairs, to decide the ending sounds (/t/, /d/, or /id/). Then, the students wrote their answers on the board and the class decided if they were correct. I thought I was learner-centered because I provided the students with tasks in which they made decisions.

Missing Component

An important component was missing, however: the students' input on what and how to learn. I did not spend enough time learning about their needs, interests, and styles of learning. I used materials that I thought were interesting and relevant, but I was not giving my students a voice in selecting the topics they studied and the ways they learned best.

Then I began to understand that the manner in which our meetings were conducted by Literacy South staff demonstrated a learner-centered philosophy. Throughout the project they asked us — the participants — how we felt about the process: if we had too much information or not enough. Adjustments were made based on our comments. One such example is when our meeting time was near to ending and we were not through our agenda. The group

negotiated how to spend the remaining time rather than having it decided for us. We had a voice in what we were doing and how we were doing it. In my journal I wrote, "I also really like how the activities we do in the project are done in a way to illustrate teaching philosophies, i.e., leading sessions in a learner-centered way."

Here is another example. On the last night of our second retreat, after a long day of working, we created images, with paper, glue, and scissors, of the process we had been through over the past eight months. It was optional: only those who wanted to participated, and we were free to create. We explained our pictures to the group and put them together to form a paper quilt, each individual having developed a piece of the whole. I was not only learning about the philosophy, but experiencing it, too, and finding I liked that type of learning environment.

I also recognized the value of applying your philosophy in all aspects of your job. Instead of saying, "we believe in a learner-centered ESOL teaching philosophy," Literacy South staff demonstrated the philosophy, showing that it is not just a belief, but a way of working. I wanted to apply these beliefs in all aspects of my practice. I came to understand that I do not have to be the 'expert teacher' but the effective administrator. I can find out the needs of the teachers and provide them with learner-centered training, which could motivate them to incorporate these principles in their classrooms.

Inquiry Project

Each project participant did an inquiry project. An inquiry project was defined as a "mode of research driven by the learner's desire to look deeply into a question or an idea that interests him or her." We each defined a question, developed a way to gather data, gathered data, and analyzed the results. Everyone in the project did an inquiry project that related to our end goal of identifying teaching principles for adult ESOL.

I wanted to provide the Wake Tech ESOL instructors not participating in the project with an opportunity to explore their teaching beliefs. I also wanted to see if their beliefs were like those of the project members'. I surveyed approximately 68 Wake Tech ESOL teachers to learn about their teaching beliefs and to find out if having a framework developed by their peers would be helpful. I had read, "Teachers' belief systems are founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the content and process of teaching, and their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it. These beliefs and values serve as the background to much of the teachers' decision making and action . . ." (Richards & Lockhart, 1994, p. 30). Since the choices teachers make illustrate their teaching beliefs, I questioned them about their criteria for planning lessons and selecting materials, how they define a successful lesson, and the effects of their own language learning experiences, as well as their ESOL teaching philosophy.

The survey data I collected indicated that many teachers used important aspects of a learner-centered practice. They focused on meeting

Wake Tech ESOL Teachers' Questionnaire

1. How long have you been teaching ESOL?
2. Why are you working as an ESOL instructor?
3. Describe your formal education (in any field):
4. Describe your training in teaching ESOL:
5. Complete this sentence: A successful lesson is one in which
6. Describe a successful/good lesson that you taught.
7. How do you decide what you will teach?
8. When choosing materials (a photocopy or book) what criteria do you use?
9. Have you studied/learned another language? Yes or No
   a. If yes, (circle all that apply) When: High School College Living abroad Other: _____
   b. What helped you learn another language?
   c. What hindered your language learning?
   d. What effect did those (9a, 9b, 9c) have on your ESOL teaching?
10. Describe your teaching philosophy as an ESOL teacher.
11. Would having guidelines for teachers of adult ESOL that were developed by your peers be helpful? Why or why not?

their students' needs and providing a comfortable, safe, classroom atmosphere. Many teachers also noted that, with curriculum that was relevant to students' lives and needs, learners engaged more in the learning process. I met with a focus group of four teachers to discuss these ideas further. I learned that the focus group participants shared this philosophy, but perhaps not as strongly as those who experienced it by participating in the project. I realized that the teachers who were not participating in the project would need to have a voice in the process to accept our group's guiding principles. To help others incorporate these changes into their practices, they would need to be provided with opportunities to experience them in action.

Implementation

Now, as ESOL Coordinator, I have the on-going challenge of implementing the beliefs I had gained. I have wondered how I can employ a more learner-centered format in our staff development. This task is exciting and scary at the same time. It is exciting to work with and develop staff in this way, but it is scary because it is very challenging. I question how well I can do it within the constraints of the system, which include a staff of part-time instructors who get no pay for professional development. I feel pressure to model our guiding principles, understanding that if teachers are to implement a learner-centered philosophy, they need to experience one, as I did.

In the teacher preservice training I did after completing the project, I tried to implement some beliefs I gained from my experience. For example, in the first session, instead of presenting the information myself, I asked the new teachers to choose a component of the paperwork and present it to the others. They chose the item and the method of presentation. They presented the detailed information in a simple and straight-forward manner. I probably would have provided too many details that they would not have remembered.

After my efforts to provide a more learner-centered teacher training, I was disappointed that the evaluations were not more glowing. However, the goal of being learner-centered is finding out what the needs are and feeling comfortable expressing those needs honestly. I learned that it is not necessarily negative to hear what needs were not met. Now I have more information to consider in preparing for future trainings. I also see I must find out the needs of each new group of teachers. Just as teachers in the classrooms need to make ongoing adjustments to meet their students needs, I must continually work on providing professional development designed for the varying needs of each group of new teachers.

In Conclusion

Several factors helped motivate me to change. One important element was the project group. I respected them and valued their insights and opinions. In our ESOL classrooms, we try to establish a community of learning in which students feel comfortable taking risks to learn. This was also the case in the project community, where I was able to discuss, read, write, and experience new ideas. I felt comfortable in reflecting on my teaching practices and inquiring about my teaching beliefs as well as those of other Wake Tech ESOL teachers. Another important element that helped change to occur was reflection. I reflected on and questioned my past and present experiences and their effectiveness. Also, the project was interesting. It was exciting to develop professionally and to gain information I can use to help other teachers' professional development.

As I have said, we came together with the goal of developing an ESOL framework for adult educators on North Carolina. My focus was not on changing my beliefs, but on contributing to the framework we were jointly creating. Even though I was not trying to change, I think the reasons I did would work for those actively seeking to. These elements are reflection and inquiry, experience, and implementation. They must occur in a comfortable, safe environment. Change and its implementation are not easy, but are made easier with support and encouragement. Knowing this, I can continue trying to employ these beliefs in helping other ESOL teachers in their own change and professional growth.

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Edith Cowper is currently an ESOL Coordinator for Wake Technical Community College Basic Skills Division and a work group member of the Adult ESOL Curriculum Framework Inquiry Project. She has taught ESOL in the U.S. and abroad, in a variety of settings, including intensive programs, workplace, and junior high school.

Curriculum Frameworks

Turn to the Blackboard on page 28 for information on how to get a copy of the Curriculum Frameworks developed by Edith Cowper and her colleagues.

Research Agenda for Adult ESL

Much is known about best practices in adult English as a second language (ESL), but unanswered questions about the adult English language learner, program design, teacher preparation, instruction, and assessment still exist. The answers to these questions are critical, not only to improve the effectiveness of adult ESL programs but also to improve the lives of adult ESL learners.

In 1996, the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE) at the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in Washington, D.C., was asked by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) to assist in the development of a research and development agenda focused specifically on adult English language learners and adult ESL program issues. Its objectives are to provide funders with clear priorities for funding; to provide researchers with support for proposing specific projects; and to provide a focus for discussion about how to improve adult ESL programs.

In collaboration with NCSALL, and with additional sponsorship and support from Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL), NCLE has now completed the agenda, incorporating feedback from learners, instructors, program administrators, policymakers, and researchers. It is available, free, from NCLE, 4646 40th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20016; (202) 362-0700 extension 200. It can also be downloaded from NCLE's web site at www.cal.org/ncle ❖

NCSALL Research FINDINGS

Health a Relatively High Priority, Suggests Survey

Findings from a recent NCSALL survey of 52 state directors of Adult Basic Education (ABE) suggest that health as a content area and health as a skill area are relatively high priorities for them. However, state directors identify a number of barriers, among them lack of good curricula and health-related teacher training, as constraints to implementing health as a content area in ABE. Each state and U.S. protectorate has a director of Adult Basic Education, responsible for administering federal adult basic education funds and policies.

The survey was developed by NCSALL's Dr. Rima Rudd as part of her on-going examination of health and literacy. State directors were asked to rate the value of health as a content area, as a subject of study, as a skill area, and as a barrier to learning. They were asked about barriers to incorporating health lessons in adult learning centers. They were also asked to identify the concerns or considerations that must be addressed before teachers could incorporate health as a content area. The survey also invited commentary.

Of the 52 state directors, 46, or 88 percent, completed and returned the survey form. Each of the four regions of the country — Northeast, South, Midwest, and West — was represented.

The state directors were asked to rate four different aspects of health and literacy on a five point scale, with one indicating low priority and five indicating high priority. They offered a mean rating of 3.8 — higher than mid-range — to health as a content area in support of curriculum goals. They offered a similarly higher than mid-range rating, 3.5, to the extent to which health of adult learning is a barrier to learning. In both questions, the mean rating was the same for each region of the country. Overall, health as a content area, a subject of study, a skills area, and a barrier to learning, was offered a higher than mid-range rating.

While supportive of health as a content area, the state directors identified multiple barriers to addressing health in ABE and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes. The barriers include those related to teaching and those related to students. The most frequently listed barrier was lack of curriculum (resources) and/or teacher training on the topic. "[Teachers need] training in contextualized learning and targeted health education training [as well as] resources dedicated to community partnerships, particularly between ABE/ESL and health services," wrote one state director. Existing demands on teachers' time was also cited, by 15 state directors, as a barrier to addressing health in ABE and ESOL classes. **— Barbara Garner**

Full Report Available

The research report upon which this article is based is available for $5. For a copy, contact Kimberly French, NCSALL *Reports*, World Education / NCSALL, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210-1211; e-mail KFrench@WorldEd.org ❖

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Letter to the Editor

In the last issue of *Focus on Basics*, I presented and discussed the findings from a new study on the economic impact of the GED by Richard Murnane, John Willett, and myself. One of the interesting and troubling findings of that study was that there was a substantial impact of the GED on the earnings of young white dropouts (age 21-26) who passed with scores just at the passing level, but not on the earnings of young nonwhite dropouts with similar scores. I offered several possible explanations for our results. Several subsequent letters to the editor of *Focus on Basics* suggested that my explanations were dancing around a simple explanation for our findings: employer discrimination in the labor market toward nonwhite job applicants. While I understand the spirit of these responses to the article, I would like to clarify exactly what we can and cannot say with our research.

First, however, some individuals were upset with our use of the term 'nonwhite.' While another designation could have been employed, the term simply derives from data limitations. That is, in our data we were only able to identify white, non-Hispanic individuals as one group, and everyone else as the other group. Thus, the 'nonwhite' group includes African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians, and anyone else who chose a race/ethnicity category other than 'white' on the GED test form.

The central assertion in some of the letters we received was concerned the fact that our results seemed to 'prove' the existence of employer discrimination in the labor market. Yet we did not discuss that as an explanation for our findings. The reason that discussion was lacking in the article is that we CANNOT establish with our study the presence of employer discrimination. Let me begin an explanation of that statement with a review of our findings. Our study shows that young white dropouts who were 16-21 when they attempted the GED in 1990, and who just barely passed the GED exams, received a substantial boost in earnings from acquisition of the GED. Furthermore, this boost in earnings was solely due to the labor market signaling value of the credential: employers used the GED as a signal of attributes that they valued but could not directly observe (e.g., motivation, commitment to work, maturity, etc.). However, we did not find that employers similarly valued the credential when it was possessed by the young nonwhite dropouts in our study. On the face of it, this may seems like evidence of racial/ethnic discrimination in the labor market. This interpretation warrants a closer look.

The relevant 'thought-experiment' for our results concerns two hiring situations. In the first, two observationally similar young white dropouts apply for a job, one with a GED and one without. Our results suggest that, in this case, the employer will use the GED as relevant information in her hiring decision, tending to prefer the white GED-holder over the white uncredentialed dropout. In the second situation, two young nonwhite dropouts apply for a job, one possesses a GED and the other does not. Our results suggest that in this situation, the employer does not use the GED as a signal of relevant information, or at least that the employer considers other observable information as more important than the GED in the hiring decision. That is, our data show that the nonwhite GED-holder is no more likely than the uncredentialed nonwhite dropout to be hired.

There is one way that these two 'thought-experiments' could be construed as evidence of employer discrimination. If discrimination leads employers systematically to relegate young nonwhite dropouts to such low-level jobs that the employer has no need for the information of productive attributes conveyed by a GED, then we would expect no 'GED effect' on the earnings of nonwhite dropouts. Other work we have done, however, suggests that this is not the case. For example, we find that nonwhites dropouts with and without credentials in our data are employed in jobs where the returns to basic cognitive skills are just as high, and sometimes higher, than the returns to skills enjoyed by white dropouts in our data. This suggests that nonwhite dropouts are employed in jobs where skills do matter and are rewarded.

I am certainly not attempting to argue the absence of labor market discrimination. Subtle and overt acts of discrimination are common in our society. It would be naive to argue that the labor market is immune from discriminatory practices. The relevant question, however, is what can we say about market discrimination with our research, and the answer is very little.

Our results are perplexing. Why do employers seem to value the GED as a signal for white dropouts who are on the margin of passing the GED, but not for nonwhite dropouts who barely pass? The results from our study do not contribute any information to the question of employer discrimination: that is a thought experiment involving a white and an nonwhite dropout showing up for the same job, a scenario not applicable to our study.

— **John Tyler**

on research

Staff Development

"Anyone who makes decisions about staff development for teachers in adult literacy should be interested in the outcomes of this study," says Cristine Smith, principal investigator on the NCSALL staff development study. "People who want to get the most from staff development dollars, such as state literacy resource center staff, program and state ABE directors, are the primary audience. It will provide information about the contexts necessary for change and growth, and about how different models of staff development, if done well, work."

This four-year study examines how teachers change in their roles as learners, teachers, and members of the field of adult basic education (ABE) as a result of participation in one of three different models of staff development. The three roles represent widening spheres of influence. Good staff development should influence growth in all three areas.

Three Models

The three staff development approaches being examined are training/workshop, practitioner research, and mentor teacher groups. Training workshops are the most commonly used staff development method in ABE. (See page 9 for more on this model.) Practitioner research, a method growing in popularity, is when teachers choose questions to research in their classrooms. They conduct research, exploring the questions more fully or testing solutions to problems. The mentor teacher group model most closely resembles a marriage of the study circle and peer coaching. In a study circle, a group reads about and discusses a topic of interest; in peer coaching, colleagues observe each other's teaching and provide each other with structured feedback. "Each one of these three models, while different, involves acquiring knowledge, being critically reflective, and taking action," explains Smith. "The idea is to see how effective each model is, if done well, taking into account differences in teachers' backgrounds and the contexts in which they work."

The models have been designed to be accessible to teachers and affordable to states. "We may find that each model is appropriate for adult basic education," she says. "We don't know that now. We might see differences from state to state based on the way the adult basic education system and related staff development systems are administered. In Connecticut, for example, not many teachers were familiar with practitioner research, while in Massachusetts, it's widely known." The study is being conducted in Connecticut, Maine, and Massachusetts.

The research design involves running the three staff development models and collecting quantitative and qualitative data about the processes and results. One challenge lies in determining, if impact arises, the extent to which it is a result of the staff development process rather than some other factor. Influential factors might include characteristics of the teacher, such as years of experience or previous training, or characteristics of the program or system, such as full-time employment, paid time for staff development, etc. "By gathering quantitative demographic data from teachers and information about the contexts in which they work, we hope to be able to understand what is important for impact to occur," Smith explains.

Looking at Actions

They are looking at the actions the study participants — 120 teachers — take after participating in staff development, gathering data via questionnaires and interviews. Learners and program staff who are identified by participants as having been affected by the actions the study participants took as a result of their staff development experience may also be interviewed. "We won't be able to say too much about how staff development affects student learning," says Smith. "We will be able to say something about what it is going to take to get a staff development system going that enables staff to grow and change. We'll have models that are affordable and work within the ABE system."

For more information on this study, contact Dr. Cristine Smith at World Education in the Amherst office.

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— by Barbara Garner

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Staff Development Resources

• M. Burt & F. Keenan, *Trends in Staff Development for Adult ESL Instructors*. ERIC Q&A. Washington, D.C.: NCLE, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1998.

• Cassie Drennon, *Adult Literacy Practitioners as Researchers*. ERIC Digest. Washington, D.C.: NCLE, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1994.

• Mark Kutner, *Staff Development for ABE and ESL Teachers and Volunteers*. ERIC Digest. Washington, D.C.: NCLE, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1992.

ERIC/NCLE Digests are available free of charge from the National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE), 4646 40th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20016; (202) 362-0700; e-mail: ncle@cal.org. or downloaded from their web site: www.cal.org/ncle

• R. Ackland, "A review of the peer coaching literature." *Journal of Staff Development*, 12 (1) 22- 27. (1991).

• D. Fleming, *New Directions in Professional Development*. www.carei.coled.umn.edu/ResearchPractice/v4n1/NDiPD.html.

• C. Livingston, (ed.), *Teachers as Leaders: Evolving Roles*. Washington, D.C.: NEA School Restructuring Series, National Education Association, 1992.

• L. Pellicer & L. Anderson, *A Handbook for Teacher Leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc. 1995.

• J. Peters, "Strategies for reflective practice" In Ralph Brockett (ed.) *Professional Development for Educators of Adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.

• T. Shanahan, M. Meehan, & S. Mogge, *The Professionalization of the Teacher in Adult Literacy Education*. NCAL Technical Report TR94-11. Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago, Center for Literacy, 1994.

Adult ESOL Curriculum Framework Resources

• *The North Carolina Adult ESOL Curriculum Framework Inquiry Project, Building Together A Framework: Inquiry Writings*. Durham, NC: Literacy South, 1998.

• *The North Carolina Adult ESOL Curriculum Framework Inquiry Project, Building Together A Framework: The Curriculum Framework*. Durham, NC: Literacy South, 1998.

The resources listed above are both soon to be available from Peppercorn Books & Press; telephone: (336) 574-1634; fax: (336) 376-9099; or email nccomres@interpath.comm.

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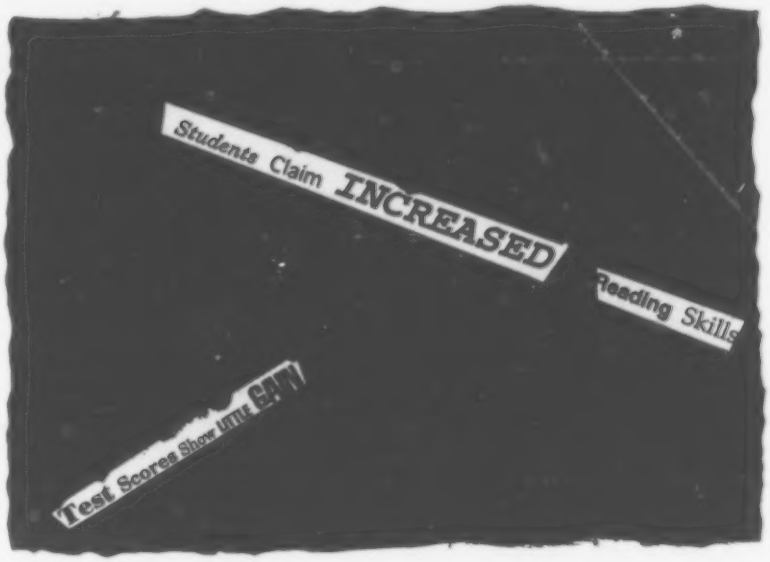

Lessons from NCSALL's Outcomes and Impacts Study

by Hal Beder

Researchers occasionally encounter contradictory findings, findings that disagree with each other to the extent that it is hard to imagine both could be true. Although this is frustrating, it is exciting too, because in resolving contradictions, new insights often emerge. In NCSALL's Outcomes and Impacts Study, we were faced with such a contradiction. After examining testing data from seven outcome and impact studies, we concluded that the evidence was insufficient to determine whether adult basic education participants gain in basic skills. In contradiction, however, learners in ten studies were asked if they gained in reading, writing, and mathematics, and they overwhelmingly reported large gains. What led to this contradiction, and what is the answer to the gain question? In this article we will examine possible reasons for the contradiction, but before we do, we will share something about our study. And as for the question of gain: that remains to be answered.

Continued on page 3

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Focus on Basics is the quarterly publication of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. It presents best practices, current research on adult learning and literacy, and how research is used by adult basic education teachers, counselors, program administrators, and policy-makers. *Focus on Basics* is dedicated to connecting research with practice, to connecting teachers with research and researchers with the reality of the classroom, and by doing so, making adult basic education research more relevant to the field.

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National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

WORLD EDUCATION

Welcome to *Focus on Basics*

Dear Readers,

We're very excited to announce that we've launched a *Focus on Basics* electronic discussion list. The list will be a virtual study circle: a place where we can debate, discuss, and critique the ideas found in *Focus on Basics*. Article authors have agreed to sign on and respond to questions about their work, and to engage in the general discussion. I will be moderating. The discussion list is very much a work in progress: your input will help shape it. If you have access, to e-mail, please sign on. For information on how to subscribe, turn to page 8, or visit the NCSALL web site, http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~ncsall.

* * *

Many adult literacy programs seek to support students in the development of not just academic skills, but other skills as well. Project-based learning is one instructional approach that seems to provide students with opportunities to hone both academics and the wide variety of other skills they may need. What is project-based learning? What are the theoretical underpinnings of this approach? What benefits does it offer and drawbacks does it present? Heide Spruck Wrigley provides us with an overview, starting on page 13. To get a real sense of what it takes to facilitate project-based learning, turn to the candid articles by teachers Susan Gaer and Deborah L. Johnson, on pages 9 and 19. Their experiences may provide you with the inspiration and strategies you need to experiment with this approach.

* * *

What do we know about the effectiveness — the outcomes and impact — of the adult literacy system in the United States today? NCSALL researcher Hal Beder examined most of the adult basic education outcome and impact studies done in the United States over the past 35 years, trying to answer this question. Given the length of his research paper — more than 130 pages and 11 sets of conclusions — and the brevity of this publication, we asked Hal to focus on one aspect of his study and walk us through the process he used so we can understand how he came to his conclusions. He chose an issue of great interest to practitioners: the contradiction between test scores and learners' self-reports of learning gain. On average, do learners gain in academic skills? The research evidence is inconclusive. Are outcome and impact studies being carried out in a manner that leads to useful results? Not often. Beder provides us with evidence of why this is so, and suggestions on how to improve research in the future.

For help in making sense of the statistics Beder includes in his article, refer to "Understanding Quantitative Research about Adult Literacy" by Thomas Valentine, page 7 of the first volume of *Focus on Basics*. It's available on our web site, http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~ncsall; back issues can be purchased for $2 a copy by contacting Kim French, World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210-1211, e-mail: FOB@WorldEd.org.

Sincerely,

Barbara Garner

Barbara Garner
Editor

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Lessons... *continued from page 1*

Critical Issue

We studied the outcomes and impacts of adult literacy education because the subject is critical for adult literacy educators today. Policy makers who control resources have increasingly demanded that accountability be based on program performance as measured by impact on learners. Indeed, under the newly enacted Workforce Investment Act (HR 1385), programs that fail to achieve stipulated outcomes can be severely sanctioned. And, since outcome and impact studies can identify program strengths and weaknesses, their results provide vital information for program planning and policy formation at the national, state, and local levels.

We characterized outcomes as the changes that occur in learners as a result of their participation in adult literacy education. We saw impacts as the changes that occur in the family and society at large. Commonly studied outcome variables include individual gains in employment, job quality, and income; reduction of welfare; learning gains in reading, writing, and mathematics; GED acquisition; and changes in self confidence. Common impact variables include effects on children's reading readiness, participation in children's school activities, and whether learners vote.

The NCSALL Outcomes and Impacts Study examined outcome and impact studies conducted since the late 1960s, including national studies, state-level studies, and studies of welfare, workplace, and family literacy programs. Its goals were to determine if the publicly funded adult literacy education program in the United States was effective; to identify common conceptual, design, and methodological problems inherent in the studies; to raise issues for policy; and to make recommendations for research, policy, and practice. In essence, the research was a study of studies. To determine whether the adult literacy program was effective, we prepared case studies on the 23 outcome studies that we judged to be the most credible from a research perspective (see box on page 4 for the criteria we used). Then, based on the case studies, we conducted a qualitative meta-analysis in which we treated each study's findings as evidence that we weighed to make conclusions about program effectiveness on commonly studied outcome and impact variables.

NCSALL Research FINDINGS

Consensus among these studies has pointed towards positive impact and, in making conclusions, we gave the evidence from more credible studies more weight.

There is no consensus on what adult literacy is, but acquisition of skills in reading, writing, and mathematics is included in almost everyone's definition of what adult literacy education should achieve. Outcome and impact studies have measured reading, writing, and mathematics gains in two ways: via tests or by questionnaires or interviews. Yet as we noted at the outset, the findings using these two methods conflict. While the results from tests are inconclusive on gain, when asked, learners generally report large gains. This calls into question whether tests are correct, whether learners are correct, or whether another explanation exists. To understand the lessons that can be learned from examining this issue, we will first look at studies that used tests and then at studies that measured learners' perception of gain through self-report.

1973 National Evaluation

The 1975 evaluation of the federal adult literacy education program was contracted to the System Development Corporation (Kent, 1973). It began in 1971 and ended two years later. At that time, the Adult Education Act restricted service to adults at the pre-secondary level, so the study was limited to learners with fewer than nine years of schooling. The study also excluded English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and learners older than 44. For the sample, states were selected according to a stratified random sampling design and programs and learners were selected using other methods of random sampling.

After reviewing learning gain tests available in 1972, the System Development Corporation selected two tests from level M of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to use as their instrument. One measured reading comprehension, the other measured arithmetic. The validity and reliability of the TABE components used were not reported. After developing directions and field testing, tests and instructions were sent to local program directors and teachers in the study sample, who were asked to do the testing. The learning gain test was first administered in May, 1972, and then

again the following May. Of the 1,108 initial tests obtained, matching tests from the first and second administration were obtained for only 441 subjects. Strictly speaking, the tests administered were not pre- and post-tests, since at initial testing learners had already received varying degrees of instruction.

When initially tested with components of the TABE, on average, learners scored at grade level 5.4 on reading achievement and 6.4 in mathematics. Raw scores were not reported. After the second administration of the test approximately four months later, in which a different test form was used, 26 percent of the students had gained one grade or more in reading, 41 percent had some gain, but less than one grade, and 33 percent had zero or negative gain. In mathematics, 19 percent gained one or more grades, 46 percent gained some, but less than one grade, and 35 percent showed zero or negative gain.

The proportions of those who gained and those who did not may have been affected by the differing hours of instruction learners had amassed between first and second test administration. While almost a fifth of the learners had 39 or fewer hours of instruction between the first and second testing, another fifth had 80 or more hours of instruction. Average gains for reading were 0.5 grades after 98 hours and 0.4 grades after 66 hours. For mathematics, the comparable figures were 0.3 grades and 0.3 grades respectively.

In the 1973 National Evaluation, we see many problems. Because of high attrition, the test scores are not representative of adult literacy learners in general. Furthermore, what do the gains reported mean? Are they high, medium, or low? In the absence of standards against which to assess learning gain, we do not know.

California GAIN Study

GAIN (Greater Avenues for Independence) was California's JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills) program. The tested learning gain data come from the larger evaluation of the entire GAIN program conducted by the Manpower Development Research Corporation (Martinson & Friedlander, 1994). The GAIN evaluation included an experimental design. The experimental design of GAIN is very important for the credibility of the research. In an experimental design, subjects are randomly assigned either to a treatment group, which in this case received instruction, or to a control group, which does not receive the treatment. Because random assignment insures that the two groups are same in every aspect except the treatment, when the performance of the two groups is compared, any difference between them can be logically attributed to the treatment. In short, an experimental design allows us to infer that adult literacy education caused an outcome to occur. This is critical because many outcomes, increased pay and welfare reduction for example, are susceptible to economic and social forces that have nothing to do with participation in adult literacy education. Thus, in the absence of an experimental design, we cannot be sure that participation caused the gains measured.

Between seven and 14 months after a county implemented GAIN, those welfare recipients who had scored below 215 on the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System test (CASAS) were randomly assigned either to a treatment group or to a control group. The treatment group was required to attend JOBS-sponsored adult literacy education classes; the control group was not required to attend them, but could attend non-JOBS sponsored classes if they wished. As its learning gain test, GAIN used the Test of Applied Literacy Skills (TALS) quantitative literacy section, which is similar to the quantitative literacy test used by the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS). The test was administered to 1,119 treatment and control group members in their homes two to three years after random assignment. During that period learners had received an average of 251 scheduled hours of instruction.

The researchers found that, on average, learners gained a statistically nonsignificant 1.8 points on the TALS test, a gain that was far too small to infer impact. However, despite the very small average learning gains, differences among the six counties were substantial. In fact, in two counties the control group actually outperformed the treatment group, and in one county the treatment group outperformed the control

Criteria For Selecting Studies

- The study included an outcome/impact component.
- The report was adequately documented with respect to design and methods.
- There were an adequate number of cases.
- The sampling plan was adequate (i.e., could and did result in external validity).
- Data collection procedures were adequate (i.e., were not tainted by substantial attrition or biased by other factors).
- Objective measures, rather than self-report, were used to measure outcomes.
- Measures, especially tests, were valid and reliable.
- The research design included a control group.
- Inferences logically followed from the design and data.

group by a highly statistically significant 33.8 percent.

National Evenstart Evaluation

Evenstart is the national, federally funded family literacy program. To be eligible for Evenstart funding, a program must have an adult literacy education program, early childhood education, parent education, and home-based services. The National Evaluation was contracted to Abt Associates (St. Pierre et.al., 1993, 1995). As with the GAIN evaluation, the tested learning gain component of the Evenstart program was part of a larger study that assessed all the components of Evenstart.

Learning gain was measured in two components, 1) the National Evaluation Information System (NEIS) a data set of descriptive information collected from local programs, and 2) an in-depth study of 10 local programs. For the NEIS, data were collected from families at entry, at the end of each year, and at exit. The CASAS was used to test learning gain. For the in-depth study, data were collected from participants in 10 programs selected because of geographic location, level of program implementation, and willingness to cooperate. The in-depth study included an experimental design. CASAS tests were administered to 98 control and 101 treatment group members who were adult literacy education participants from five of the ten programs. Although control group members were not participants in adult literacy education at the time of the pretest, they were not precluded from future participation if they wished. Study subjects were pre-tested in the fall of 1991 and then post-tested twice, nine months later and 18 months later.

For the in-depth study, valid pre- and post-tests were received from 61 participants and 53 control group members. Note two problems: this is a small number of subjects and there was substantial attrition from both groups. At the second post-test (18 months), a statistically nonsignificant difference of 3.7 points on the CASAS was found between the gains of the two groups, leading the evaluators to conclude that Evenstart adult literacy instruction had not produced learning gain, at least in respect to the in-depth study. The NEIS component, which did not use an experimental design, did show small but statistically significant gains of 4.6 points on the CASAS after 70 hours of instruction.

The NEAEP

The National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs (NEAEP), which was conducted by Development Associates Inc., began in 1990, was concluded in 1994, and issued five reports of findings: Development Associates (1992), Development Associates (1993), Development Associates (1994), Young, Fitzgerald and Morgan (1994a), and Young, Fitzgerald and Morgan (1994b). Costing almost three million dollars, the NEAEP was the largest and most comprehensive of three national evaluations of the federal adult literacy education program. Data on learners were collected at several points. Client Intake Record A was completed for each sampled student at the time of intake, and, with this instrument, data for 22,548 learners were collected from a sample of 116 local programs. The sample was drawn using a statistical weighting system designed to enable the researchers to generalize findings from the sample to the United States as a whole. Client Intake Record B was completed for all learners who supposedly completed Intake Record A and completed at least one class. For this data collection, records were gathered for 13,845 learners in 108 programs. Learner attrition from the study was clearly evident between the administration of the two instruments. Indeed, by the second data collection (Intake B) eight programs and more than 8,000 learners had dropped from the study: many learners who attended intake sessions never attended a class; also, some records were not forwarded to the researchers. After the second data collection, additional data were collected at five to eight week intervals for 18 weeks.

"The most serious problem may lie in the tests themselves."

The NEAEP lacked the resources to send trained test administrators into the field to administer tests, so it had to rely on program staff to give the tests and had to use the tests that programs normally used. Because the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System test (CASAS) and the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) were in sufficiently wide use, they were chosen as the tests for the project. The programs selected for the study were supposed to administer either of these tests near the inception of instruction and again after 70 and 140 hours of instruction. Pretests were obtained from 8,581 learners in 88 programs and post-tests were received from 1,919 learners in 65 programs. As one can see, the attrition between pre- and post-tests was substantial due to learner drop out and the failure of programs to either post-test or to submit the test data. Moreover, when Development Associates checked the tests, much of the data was so suspect that it was deleted from the study. The NEAEP was left with only 614 usable pre- and post-test scores, less than 20 percent of the intended number of valid cases.

Based on these 614 cases, the NEAEP reported that ABE students received a mean of 84 hours of instruction between pre- and post-tests and attended for an average of 15 weeks. On average, their gain was 15 points on the TABE. Adult secondary students received a mean of 63 hours of instruction and gained seven points on the TABE. All gains were statistically significant at the 0.001 level (Young et al, 1994a).

The NEAEP found that learners do gain in basic skills, but how credible are the findings? In a reanalysis of the Development Associates data, Cohen, Garet, and Condelli (1996, p.xi) concluded:

"The implementation of the test plan was also poor, and this data should not be used to assess the capabilities of clients at intake. Some of the key evidence supporting this conclusion includes:

Only half the clients were pretested, and sites that pretested differed from sites that did not. At sites that pretested only some of their clients, pretested clients differed from those who were not pretested.

Programs reported perfect exam scores for a substantial proportion of pretested clients.

Less than 20 percent of eligible clients received a matched pretest and posttest.

Among clients eligible to be posttested, significant differences exist among those who were and were not posttested.

The available matched pre- and posttests were concentrated in a very few programs.

These facts render the test data unusable. Therefore this reanalysis invalidates all of the findings concerning test results from the original analysis."

Stated simply, because of the problems noted by Cohen, Garet, and Condelli, the test scores received by the NEAEP, as with those of the 1975 National Evaluation, are most certainly biased and, therefore, not representative of adult literacy learners in general. Perhaps, for example, the learners from whom valid pre- and post-test scores were obtained were more motivated and able and the scores are inflated. Perhaps they were less able. We simply do not know. Again, lacking standards, we do not know whether the gains reported should be considered high, medium, or low.

The Answer?

The two national evaluations and the NEIS component of the National Evenstart Evaluation do show tested learning gain, but learner attrition from both national evaluations was so severe that we cannot generalize the results. In addition, these studies did not use an experimental design. In contrast, the two studies that did use an experimental design, the GAIN study and the in-depth component of the Evenstart study, showed no significant tested learning gain. Both studies were limited in other ways that space does not permit us to describe here. The studies included in the Outcomes and Impact Study that are not reported here show a similar pattern of confusion on tested learning gain. As measured by tests, do learners gain basic skills as a consequence of their participation? The jury is still out.

"As measured by tests, do learners gain basic skills as a consequence of their participation? The jury is still out."

Learners' Perceptions

As noted at the outset of this article, when learners are asked whether they have gained skills in reading, writing, and math as a result of participation in ABE, they tend to respond in the affirmative. The National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs (NEAEP) conducted a telephone survey of 5,401 former ABE learners. Respondents were asked if they had gained in basic skills. Although many of the former learners who were supposed to be interviewed could not be found, and although many respondents had received very little actual instruction, 50 percent of the ABE learners and 45 percent of the adult secondary education (ASE) learners said that participation had helped their reading "a lot." For math, the figures were 51 percent for ABE and 49 percent for ASE.

In another national evaluation of the Federal Adult Education Program conducted in 1980 (Young et al, 1980), data were collected from 110 local programs stratified according to type of funding agency and program size. Learners were interviewed over the phone. Although the response rate to the interviews was low, 75 percent of those interviewed responded that they had improved in reading, 66 percent said they improved in writing, and 69 percent reported that they had improved in math.

In a study in New Jersey (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1984), a random sample of 294 learners who had been enrolled for seven to eight months was interviewed. Of the respondents, 89 percent said that participation in ABE had helped them become better readers, 65 percent

reported that ABE classes had helped their writing, and 85 percent said participation had helped their math. A study in Maryland (Walker, Ewart, & Whaples, 1981) interviewed 120 ABE learners who enrolled in Maryland programs and volunteered for the study. Of the respondents, 81 percent reported they could read better because of participating and 90 percent reported that their computational skills had improved.

A study in Ohio (Boggs, Buss, & Yarnell, 1979) followed up on learners who had terminated the program three years earlier. Data were collected by telephone. Of the 351 valid respondents, 96 percent of those who said improving their reading was a goal reported they had reached the goal. For those who had improvement in math as a goal, the figure was 97 percent. Finally, in a study in Wisconsin (Becker, Wesselius, & Fallon, 1976) that assessed the outcomes of the Gateway Technical Institute, a comprehensive adult literacy education program that operated learning centers in a wide range of locations, data were collected from a random sample of former learners who were classified into four categories based on the amount of instruction they had received. A total of 593 learners were contacted and asked if they would participate; 270 usable interviews resulted. That the program helped them with reading was reported by 90 percent, 83 percent reported that the program had helped with writing, and 82 percent reported that they had been helped with math.

The Answer?

The limitations of self-report surface in these studies. Participation in adult literacy education is hard work and becoming literate is socially acceptable behavior. It could be that self-reported perceptions of basic skills gain are inflated by the normal human tendency to answer with socially acceptable responses and a reluctance to say unfavorable things in a program evaluation. In most of the studies, a large discrepancy existed between the number of learners the evaluation planned to interview and the number who actually completed interviews. It could be that those who were biased in favor of the evaluated programs were more likely to respond to interviews than those who were unfavorably disposed: the "if you can't say anything good, don't say anything at all" syndrome. Indeed, for the Maryland and Wisconsin studies, the respondents had volunteered to be included and may have been favorably biased in comparison to those who did not volunteer.

Then again, perhaps the self-report data are accurate and learners are recognizing important gains in themselves that are too small to be measured by tests. Shirley Brice Heath (1983), for example, chronicles how being able to write for the first time a simple list or a note to one's children is perceived as a significant benefit to those with limited literacy skills. It is doubtful that any of the tests in common usage are sensitive enough to register such gains.

Lessons

Although the studies reviewed here are just a sample of those analyzed in the full report of the Outcomes and Impacts Study, they provide many lessons. First, even the best outcome studies are limited in many ways, and these limitations influence findings. The most common limitation is a unacceptably large attrition of subjects between pre- and post-testing. The subjects for whom both pre-and post-test data are available almost always differ substantially from those who were only pre-tested because those who are not post-tested include a high proportion of dropouts.

A second common limitation is post-testing before substantial learning gain can be reasonably expected. Although what constitutes a reasonable time is open to debate, surely 30 hours of instruction is suspect and even 60 hours is questionable. Giving inappropriate levels of tests often creates ceiling or floor effects. In any test, there is a chance factor. When a test is too hard, learners score at the bottom, or floor. Since the scores cannot go down any further "by chance," and can only go up, the chance factor artificially inflates the post-score. When the test is too easy, the opposite – or ceiling effect – occurs. Many of the tests Development Associates had to delete for the study in the NEAEP suffered from ceiling or floor effects.

The most serious problem with testing may lie in the tests themselves. To be valid, tests must reflect the content of instruction, and the extent to which the TABE or CASAS reflects the instruction of the programs they are used to assess is an unanswered question. Similarly, it may be that the tests are not sensitive enough to register learning gains that adult learners consider to be important.

With some exceptions, such as the California GAIN Study, most outcome evaluations have relied on local programs to collect their data, a practice that is common in elementary and secondary education research. However, adult literacy education is not like elementary and secondary education, where the learners arrive in September and the same learners are still participating in June. Many adult literacy programs have open enrollments, most have high attrition rates, and few have personnel on staff who are well-trained in testing or other data collection. These factors confound accurate record keeping and systematic post-testing at reasonable

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and predetermined intervals. Moreover, many adults are reluctant to take tests.

Perhaps the most important lesson for policy and practice is that credible outcomes and impacts research is expensive and requires researchers who are not only experts in design and methodology but who also understand the context of adult literacy education. If data are to be collected from programs, staff must have the capacity to test and to keep accurate records. This will require more program resources and staff development. Good outcome studies help demonstrate accountability and enable us to identify practices that work. Bad outcome studies simply waste money.

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Less Teaching and More Learning

Turning from traditional methods to project-based instruction, the author found that her students learned more

by Susan Gaer

I was a traditional teacher using a grammar-based curriculum along with dialogues and drills to teach English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) to immigrant populations when I arrived at the Visalia Adult School in central California in 1989. There I found a population of Southeast Asian Lao, Hmong, Mien, and Lahu refugees who had been in beginning-level ESOL classes since their arrival in the United States in the early 1980s. Most of the instructors were using the type of instruction I did; it was not working with the group at all. The students seemed resistant and had little confidence in their ability to learn English.

Reading all I could on different types of learning, I came across Elsa Auerbach's work. In her book *Making Meaning, Making Change*, she describes ways to help students develop language skills while conducting a meaningful project. I was intrigued about the possibilities of using a project-based curriculum and decided to try it.

I described some projects from *Making Meaning, Making Change* to my students, explaining that I would like them to do something similar. They agreed to give it a try. In searching for a topic, we talked about the concerns they had that their children were losing their cultures. The students wanted to do something about this. We decided they could write down recipes they knew from Southeast Asia, recipes that were, until then, passed orally from cook to cook. Students brought ingredients to school, learned the terms for how to measure them, then made the food. We wrote down the recipes as the food was prepared and compiled them into a cookbook. This project helped my students develop a sense of community and an interest in attempting a more complicated project.

Folktales

Following the cookbook effort, I wanted another project that would put the students in the role of expert. Most of the students had minimal reading and writing skills but very strong oral traditions. At the time, I was working with a family literacy program as a volunteer. The program focused a lot on storytelling. I realized that the students could be experts and pass on some of their culture by telling the Lao, Hmong Mien, and Lahu folktales that they had learned as children.

The original idea was to have the students practice the folktales and then tell them to elementary or pre-school children. Looking for information on how American folktales are told, I went to the district librarian. She informed me that the eighth grade curriculum had a unit on folk tales and suggested that I team up with a class at the middle school to develop a joint project. I contacted the appropriate teacher, who was enthusiastic. Together we defined the project: my students would tell folktales from their countries to the middle school students. The middle school students would write them down and illustrate them and we would try to get them published. My language objectives for the class were to have students tell a sequenced story using pictures as a storyboard that would be understandable to the eighth graders. My students would read what the middle school students had written and critique it for accuracy.

When I first approached my students with this project they were not sure it would be possible, concerned that their language skills were not good enough. If I thought it would work, however, they wanted to do it. They wanted to get these folktales written in English for their children and grandchildren. They knew that their oral traditions were dying and this would be a way to preserve some of their culture.

The district librarian came to class and, telling tales such as *The Three Little Pigs* and *Cinderella*, showed the students the various ways that folktales could be told using puppets, visuals, body language, and role play. This was foreign to my students. Their storytelling customs included very little use of body language and no visuals. To engage eighth graders, however, I suspected they would need something in addition to their oral skills. We decided on using visuals to supplement the storytelling.

After the librarian's visit, the eighth grade class hosted a get-together so they could get to know my students. The middle school students were fascinated by my students' childhoods. They were particularly intrigued by the early age of marriage in the Hmong, Lahu, Lao,

and Mien communities. While only a handful of my students had shown up for this activity, all who attended seemed to have a wonderful time.

When we next met in the classroom, a discussion developed among the students. I did not take part. After it was over, those who were not at the party apologized for being absent, admitting that they did not come for fear of being ridiculed by middle school students, who were the same age as their children. They had heard about how well the party had gone and about how interested these children were in their lives and cultures. They asked me to schedule another meeting, promising to attend. This is, indeed, what happened. Not only did every one of my students come, they brought some of their family members as well.

Meaningful Language

Once the two classes had met, the real work began. I divided my students into language groups: Lahu, Lao, Hmong, Mien. Each group chose a folktale to tell. Then they had to find pictures to go with story. This required research in a local library looking for appropriate pictures. My students prepared storyboards — visuals depicting the story — and practiced telling their stories. They practiced in class and with other classes. They practiced and practiced and practiced. This is when I first started seeing meaningful language development grow out of project-based instruction. Usually when I asked my students to practice a language structure, they did so for only a few minutes. With this activity, I asked them to stop and they begged me to let them continue. They really wanted to do their best in front of those eighth graders. In addition to practicing, I had borrowed many American folktales from the district library and read these on a regular basis with my class. At the same time, the middle school students were learning how to ask for clarification and what types of details make for a good written story, and studying the cultures of the students.

Finally, the day arrived. My students told their folktales to the middle school students, who recorded them on audio tape. Although the tales were never officially published, I label the project a success. I believe that by practicing to present a folk tale, my students improved their oral skills; their presentations in English were the proof. In earlier ESOL classes, my students were trying to learn grammar and failed. This project allowed them to be in control, as they once were in their native countries. They had a successful interchange with native speakers of English. In addition, during this project, my students were content experts and the middle school students were learning from them. I believe this raised my students' self-esteem. My students also expressed satisfaction in seeing a previously unwritten tale documented. The eighth graders seemed to get a lot out of this experience, as well.

A New Setting

Six years and many projects later, I joined the staff of Santa Ana College, School of Continuing Education, Centennial Education Center in Santa Ana, California. Located in an urban setting, it has about 36,000 ESOL students, most of whom are Latino. Enamoured as I was with project-based education, I wanted to develop a project that would work here, with these students. Because Santa Ana had very structured curricula with set

A Hmong Folktale

Once upon a time in Laos there lived two people who were very much in love. Their names were Tongni and Saemi. The young sixteen-year-old couple wanted desperately to get married. The only thing standing in the way of the couple's happiness was Tongni's parents' strong disapproval of Saemi. Tongni's parents refused to let their beloved son marry her because she was from a Hmong clan different from their own.

Tongni's love for Saemi was so great that he died of a broken heart. He could not accept the fact that he would never be able to marry his true love, unless his parents changed their minds about her. Saemi sang mournful songs expressing her feelings about how she had no place to go and how she didn't know what to do now that she must live without her only true love. After Tongni was buried, Saemi went to see him. She couldn't see him while he was being buried because in the Hmong custom, it is wrong for the women to see the burial. For seven days Saemi took rice, chicken, and pies to Tongni's house. At his house, Saemi cried and called frantically for him to wake up. She did this six times and still he did not wake up. But the seventh time she called him, Tongni rose from the dead and Saemi was overwhelmed with joy.

The couple went to Tongni's house and begged his parents' approval of their marriage. They reminded his parents that Saemi had proved faithful to Tongni by waking him up. His parents were pleased that their son was finally getting married. At Tongni and Saemi's joyful wedding, they received beautiful new clothes and had a lot of fun. The wedding was very festive with many joyful people. Tongni and Saemi rejoiced their life together and lived happily ever after.

— told by Hmong students at the Visalia Adult School and written by students at Green Acres Middle School in Visalia, CA

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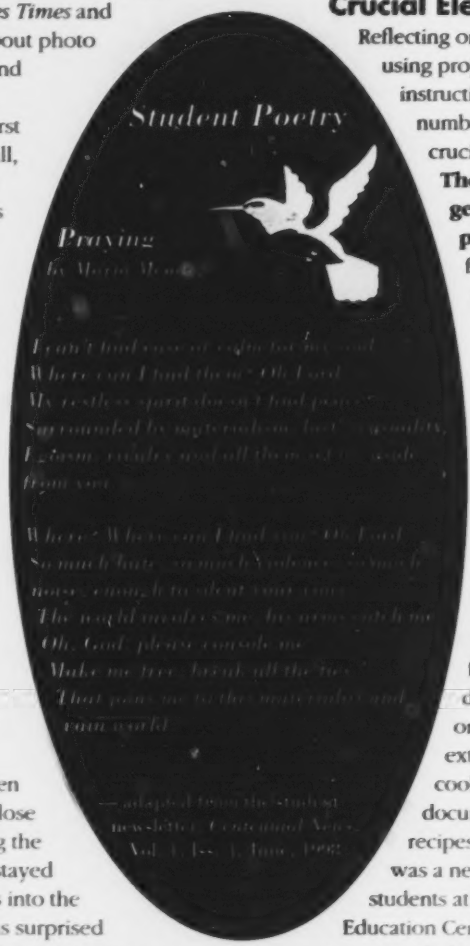
standards that had to be met, I started out by integrating small projects into the curriculum. Lower level students developed a photo essay about their families; upper level students wrote about their families and made class books.

I wanted to do something that would have an impact on the student body as a whole. In the spring of 1996, I interviewed students involved in student government about what they felt was lacking in the school. The consensus was that a student newspaper was needed. So, I decided to propose a class that would develop one. It was approved by the curriculum committee and my department by the end of summer, 1996. The class I created was called Computers and Writing. It began in the fall of 1997.

I advertised the class; about 12 students enrolled. Despite the late afternoon schedule, the 12 were there everyday. We formed an editorial committee and wrote a survey that we distributed to all students via their teachers. The survey was in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese so that everyone could respond. Survey questions listed topics that the newspaper could cover, such as art, sports, games, articles about the community, articles about school events, school calendar. Students checked the topics in which they were interested. We received about 500 responses, tallied them, and used the information to decide what features we would run in the first issue of our newspaper. We then issued a call for articles and got quite a few articles from students on all campuses of the college.

While the students were creating the issue, I spent a lot of time working with them on the skills needed to write articles, using the writing process approach. For example, in one issue students interviewed our Dean. First, they wrote questions, next they interviewed her, taping the interview. Finally, they wrote the article. At each step of the way, I critiqued their work, helped them develop the articles, and worked on necessary grammar points related to their articles. We also studied the *Los Angeles Times* and learned about photo captions and headlines.

The first issue, in fall, 1997, was nine pages long. Although class met for only five hours a week, between work done at home and in class, the students worked on the paper for about 12 hours a week. When we were close to finishing the issue, we stayed long hours into the night. I was surprised that the editorial group was willing to do this. We published the paper by Thanksgiving and, after a publishing party of sparkling apple cider and chips, we evaluated the process. Students in the class wanted to do more writing. We had received so many articles from other classes that few articles from the class were needed. We have gradually worked more class writing into the newspaper. Our administration was so pleased with the product that they provided a newspaper stand in which we could place copies of the newspaper. We have now published three issues of the newspaper and hope that this school year brings at least three more issues.



Crucial Elements

Reflecting on my experiences using project-based instruction, I realize that a number of elements are crucial to success.

The project must be geared to the population. The folktale project would not have worked with my young urban Latino population. The newspaper would have been a disaster with my mostly non-literate Southeast Asians.

The students must see value in a project. The folktale project was developed to save oral stories from extinction. The cookbook project documented traditional recipes. The newspaper was a need identified by the students at the Centennial Education Center. If the project resonates with the students, then they will work to complete it.

Flexible timelines are necessary. I have had the most success when projects can start and end within a four- to six-week time frame. This allows students a sense of completion and success. Although my newspaper project is a semester-long course, I try to get the students to produce a newspaper every six weeks.

Athough, in theory, students

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"...using a project-based approach to language learning gives meaning to the learning that normally goes on in a classroom."

should choose projects themselves, in lower-level ESOL classes, students quite often do not have the language or confidence to develop project themes. I listen to my students to identify underlying issues that are meaningful to them. To get hints about what will engage them, I pay attention to what they read, write, and say about their lives, their families, and their jobs. I have found that, in the beginning, sometimes even with more advanced ESOL students, I choose the project, but as time goes on, the choice of project shifts to them.

With beginning level students, I need to take a fairly active role, providing examples of completed projects to encourage the students to produce their own. With more advanced classes, it is easier to get the class to develop a project that meets a need they have identified. In these situations, I take the role of a facilitator. Classes can do multiple projects if the class has multiple needs. In a multilevel class, learners can be grouped and a number of different projects can be run at the same time. If a class identifies a number of needs, they can also work in groups clustered around different needs.

As I work through the first projects with new students, they are rather skeptical. But once they see the finished product, whether it is a cookbook, a newspaper, a performance, or something else, their skepticism evaporates. At my school, word of mouth has brought me classes ready to embark on a project.

Conclusion

Using a project-based approach has helped motivate students to learn language for a purpose. I have also found that this methodology promotes community among class members. In both the folktale and the newspaper projects, a developing sense of community helped foster the motivation needed to see the project to completion.

I have since started integrating mini-projects into all my general ESOL classes at the Centennial Education Center at Santa Ana. Projects that students choose to do are based on material in their textbook. For example, in my beginning class, we devote much time to learning how to talk about the family and daily life. The class produces a small book which includes stories about family, work, and weekend life. These types of projects require the students to use the material in a meaningful way. Projects need not be as extensive as the newspaper or folktale efforts.

Using a project-based approach to language learning gives meaning to the learning that normally goes on in a classroom. I used to run a traditional teacher-centered classroom, using a textbook, and was always dismayed at how little language was learned. In project-based learning, at least the way I do it, instruction is less direct than in a traditional class. Students develop language and literacy skills by working on a product that will exist beyond the classroom walls. This creates excitement and motivation that I have not seen in a traditional, text-based-only class. In project-based learning, I do a lot less teaching and see a lot more learning.

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Finding Projects on the Web

I have developed a web page that lists a variety of projects that students can participate in or classes can replicate. The address is otan.dni.us/webfarm/emailproject/email.html. If you are interested in adding a project to this page, contact me at sgaer@earthlink.net ❖

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Knowledge in Action: The Promise of Project-Based Learning

by Heide Spruck Wrigley

Imagine a group of adult basic education students sewing a quilt that displays the story of their collective lives, or a GED class doing a research study that involves calling former students to find out if participating in the class has made a difference. Consider a group of learners starting their own cafe: negotiating space, setting budgets, getting supplies, and preparing food. Envision learners investigating the questions they have about U.S. immigration law by conducting interviews, writing about their personal experiences, talking with experts, using the library, and conducting research on the Internet. These are examples of teachers and students finding new ways of working together through a model of teaching called project-based learning.

In its simplest form, project-based learning involves a group of learners taking on an issue close to their hearts, developing a response, and presenting the results to a wider audience. Projects might last from only a few days to several months. In some cases, projects turn into businesses, such as the student-run cafe at ELISAIR, an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) program in New York City.

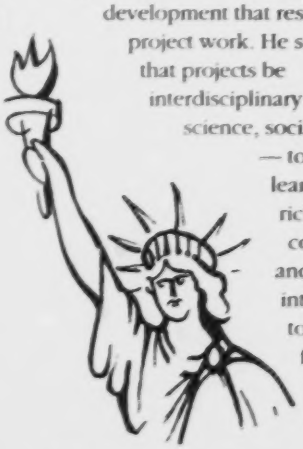
What do we know about project-based learning, and why should it be considered a viable approach to adult literacy? In this article, I situate project work within a historical context that brings inquiry-learning, a Vygotskian perspective, and progressive education into play. Although these movements occurred in a K-12 context, the language, literacy, and learning concepts pertain to adults new to reading and writing as well. I link project-based learning to other approaches to teaching and learning, such as community action research, participatory education, and functional contexts. Finally, I discuss the benefits to be derived for adult learners.

Getting Started

The ideas for projects come from many places. Sometimes an event acts as a catalyst, as when a group of ESOL learners spontaneously decide to organize a fund raiser to help flood victims in Honduras and Nicaragua, or a group of Latina women in a family literacy program decide to start their own Spanish-speaking parent teacher association (PTA) so they can more effectively give voice to the issues that concern them. At other times, a teacher gently introduces the idea for a project, testing to see if a particular idea resonates. No rules determine how a project is realized, although all projects seem to progress through some common phases: identification of a problem or issue, preliminary investigations, planning and assigning tasks, researching the topic, implementing the project, drafting and developing a final product, dissemination, and evaluating what worked.[1]

History

Project-based learning has deep roots in education. It was first discussed as an educational approach to K-12 education in an article entitled "The Project Method" by Kilpatrick (1918), who believed that using literacy in meaningful contexts provided a means for building background knowledge and for achieving personal growth. Unlike those who later advocated models of collaborative learning, Kilpatrick was less interested in the group aspects of learning than in the cognitive development that resulted from project work. He suggested that projects be interdisciplinary — math, science, social studies — to provide learners with a rich array of concepts and ideas. He intended that topics come from students' interests,



maintaining that group projects, proposed, planned, executed, and evaluated by students, would help learners develop an understanding of their lives while preparing to work within a democracy. Although Kilpatrick imagined that projects should be driven by learner questions, in practice, many teachers assign topics (Schubert, 1986), a practice that runs counter to the spirit of student-generated projects that he had in mind.

Project methods were used by advocates of a larger progressive movement in education that stressed the need for child-centered

education. John Dewey (Dewey, 1899), who thought that schools should reflect society, was a leader of this movement, which flourished from the late 19th to the mid 20th century. Progressivists believed that children learn best through experiences in which they have an interest, and through activities that allow for individual differences. Teachers were advised to observe learners and their interests so they could tie what students wanted to know to what the classroom provided. Practical inquiry — everyday problem solving — and meaning seeking as part of social interaction played a role in child-centered, progressive education, as well.

Project-based learning also reflects a Vygotskian perspective. Vygotsky, a Russian cognitive psychologist, theorizes that learning occurs through social interaction that encourages individuals to deal with the kind cognitive challenges that are just slightly above their current levels of ability (Wertsch, 1985). He posits that concepts develop and understanding happens when individuals enter into discussion and meaningful interaction with more capable peers or teachers. These individuals can model problem solving, assist in finding solutions, monitor progress, and evaluate success (Tharpe & Gallimore, 1988). Although Vygotsky himself did not discuss in detail how his theories on language and thought should translate into teaching, others have suggested that joint problem solving, with opportunities to shape and reshape knowledge through talk, promotes the cognitive development that Vygotsky saw as crucial (Driscoll, 1994).

Project-based learning has a great deal in common with participatory education and a Freirean philosophy of teaching adults. The key tenets of this approach hold that learning occurs when the content of the curriculum is drawn from the social context of the learners, and literacy (the word) is used to make sense of the circumstances of one's life (the world). Freirean educators stress the need to empower disenfranchised learners to fight the status quo and help create a more fair and equitable society through a process of critical reflection and collective action. Freirean-inspired projects differ from other learner-centered approaches inasmuch as they stress the socio-political aspects of the issues being addressed rather than focusing on the personal or cultural dimensions of literacy without reference to the broader social contexts in which literacy occurs (Auerbach, 1993; Wrigley, 1993).

As implemented in adult education, project-based learning also owes a debt to community action research, conducted by adults in literacy programs in the United States and in developing countries. While project-based learning is sometimes called "knowledge in action" (Barnes, 1988), action research has been defined as "ideas in action" (Merrifield, 1997). It constitutes a process through which adult learners develop their language, literacy, and problem solving skills while researching a problem and then moving to effect change in a community (Curtis, 1990). Throughout the world, many examples exist of neighborhood residents working as a group to discuss and examine the conditions of their lives and then speaking up to document neglect and demand changes. In some communities, adult learners have investigated toxic dumping at a landfill (Merrifield, 1997), or explored what it takes to set up a local day care center or food co-op and have taken steps to establish such programs.

Varieties

Although most project-based learning in adult basic education is smaller in scope and narrower in focus than community action research, the two models share the conviction that, if given a chance, adults without much formal education will create responses to community issues that are creative, feasible, and worthwhile. At El Barrio Popular Education Program, in East Harlem, New York, for example, the women in the program started cooking and sharing their own food for lunch in response to the high prices being charged by local restaurants. After some discussion

"...if given a chance, adults without much formal education will create responses to community issues that are creative, feasible, and worthwhile."

and research, this project grew into a catering business for the wider community as the women ended up providing Cuban and Dominican food at social events. The project achieved such success that it was highlighted in *The New York Times*.

While a community orientation to literacy education meshes nicely with project-based learning, not all project-based learning has a political focus. For example, teachers working in the humanistic tradition, which emphasizes individual growth and self-actualization rather than collective action, often encourage projects that involve personal or cultural expressions of self and community, such as oral histories. Others integrate projects into a theme-based curriculum, encouraging projects that draw on learners' creative impulses: learners may develop memory books, design original books for their children, write short plays and skits, produce poetry and songs, or put together a collection of sayings, rituals, and events from their own childhood that they want to preserve for their own children. Projects that stress expression of the human spirit through language and literature reflect a personal relevance orientation to learning, popularized by humanists such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow.[2]

Projects do not have to be designed for an audience beyond one's fellow students. Quite often learners develop questions as a group and divide the work among individuals or pairs who seek answers to selected questions using a variety of sources, such as the Internet or guest speakers (Rosen, 1998). Although the final product may be not much more than a series of questions and answers compiled in a document to be shared with the group, such projects nevertheless meet some of the criteria for project work: learners work in a group to select topics of interest and decide the direction of their learning; they rely on insights from their peers while providing feedback to others; they may use the teacher as a resource, but, by and large, they create their own knowledge.

Teachers and students concerned about life skills and the more functional components of literacy may choose projects that help learners meet critical economic needs by assisting them in adapting to new environments or function more effectively in familiar ones. These projects often result in guides

and strategies meant to make it easier to navigate systems. Examples include a handbook written by students for new students, a list of tips and hints on how to deal with the admission requirements of a college or training institute, or a description of different ways to fight a an eviction notice or challenge a traffic ticket. As learners conduct research into what it takes to negotiate bureaucracies, they acquire the knowledge and skills associated with functional competence in literacy, while developing strategies for decision making.

As the new federal requirements for temporary assistance to needy families (TANF) take effect, replacing the JOBS program, teachers who need to include a workforce development component in their curriculum see project-based work as a creative way to link learner-centered education with investigations into the world of work. Project work allows learners to work in groups, conduct research, and present it to others, developing the confidence and knowledge necessary in the job search process.[3]

Teacher's Role

Although the teacher's role in project-based learning is less that of an instructor who transmits information and organizes activities for practice and more that of a guide and a facilitator, it is a critical role, nevertheless. Projects require that teachers get to know their learners' interests. Teachers must listen for what has been called the teachable moment: that point in a discussion when learners become excited about a topic and start asking questions such as "why is *x* happening and what can we do about it?"

Facilitating project-based learning requires the kind of leadership skills that allow teachers to help a group of learners to move in the direction that they want to go, pointing out potential pitfalls or making suggestions without getting defensive when students decide they like their own ideas better. It makes a difference if teachers possess a tolerance for ambiguity, some skill in helping learners negotiate conflicts, and enough self-confidence not to give up when a project peters out or refuses to come together.

Not all projects are successful. Some teachers are too inexperienced to guide the process well. They may expect too much ability on the part of the learners to take control of the project without having laid the necessary groundwork or they may fail to let students take the lead when they can. Learners do not necessarily take to project work wholeheartedly, either. Some may feel teachers are

abdicating their roles if they do not provide answers, or they may not want to learn with and from their classmates.

Several strategies can facilitate the process. If some learners are resistant, it helps if project participation is voluntary: after a topic has been identified and possibilities discussed, learners should be able to elect to either join the project team or work on their own during the time periods set aside for group work. One or two hours per week seems optimal for project-based learning in non-intensive classes. In cases where both learners and teachers are new to project-based learning, infusing the curriculum with multiple opportunities for group discussion and decision-making can ease the transition. If adult learners decide to take on a project, they need sufficient time to plan, revise, implement and reflect on the project before it is presented to others. Anson Green (personal communication) has suggested that the tasks, time lines, and responsibilities that the group has mapped out be posted prominently on the walls as reminders of the status of a project. Frequent drafts of products help to keep the group focused on the work to be done, while encouraging individuals to shape or edit pieces that need improvement. It helps if funds are allocated so learners can budget for supplies, photocopying, invitations or flyers, and presentation materials. Even if materials are offered in-kind by the program, estimating costs and staying within a budget provides important experience for learners that translates to other contexts.

Benefits and Skill Gains

In interviews I have done with teachers involved in successful project-based learning, some themes surface: at the beginning and end of projects, learner enthusiasm seems to be increased, revitalizing classes and teachers. Since students have signed on to an issue that interests them, motivation tends to be high. As learners get involved in the inquiry process, they become curious about answers, often digging deeper into a topic and spending more time on task than they do when a teacher assigns group work. A shared work ethic is created. Teachers report that learners frequently encourage each other and lend moral support as they face the frightening prospect of a public presentation. In the end, they come through when a presentation is scheduled, appearing well prepared and on time and communicating their ideas confidently and effectively, despite any nervousness they may feel (Mary Helen Martinez, personal communication).

"...learners mention...confidence that comes from being able to map out a project and see it come to fruition..."

Others who have also talked with learners report outcomes in various domains, including attitudes, self-efficacy, and "can do" skills (Curtis, 1990; Schwartz, 1997). When asked what project work has meant to them, learners mention a greater awareness of their own abilities to research and report findings; the confidence that comes from being able to map out a project and see it come to fruition; the joy and frustration of working with others; the pride in gaining important knowledge and insights; the enthusiasm generated by mastering new technologies; and, in the case of presentations of a personal nature, the excitement of sharing a story worth telling.

Limited Research

While numerous research studies have demonstrated the positive effects of similar forms of group learning on academic skills of school-age children and youth (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1990), no large-scale studies have been conducted with learners engaged in project-based learning in adult literacy programs. However, sufficient anecdotal evidence supports the contention that project-based learning fosters the skills named by the Secretary of Labor's Commission on Necessary Skills (SCANS) as those deemed necessary to succeed in high performing workplaces. To assess fully what learners take away from project work, in terms of both group and individual learning, we would need to develop performance-based assessments that capture the knowledge, skills, and strategies that learners attain against some level of standard, developed jointly by teachers, learners, and members of the community. No studies have been done comparing project-based learning in adult education with more conventional models of teaching and learning, so to what extent basic skills as measured by standardized tests or GED completion rates are affected by project-based learning remains an open question.

When the discussion moves to literacy gains, teachers and learners are often concerned that limited time that could be spent on the practice of basic skills is instead taken up with discussions and explorations of

issues. Evidence suggests, however, that learners involved in project-based learning often spend significant amounts of time writing down ideas, reading and commenting on what others have written, and shaping the work the group is producing. Teachers report that motivation to edit is significantly higher when learners face a "real audience" made up of folks outside of the adult education community whose standards are often more rigorous than those of adult literacy teachers. It seems clear, however, that learners who participate in project work do not obtain lower scores on tests than do their classmates who are part of a more conventional approach.

As for math, when learners are engaged in projects that require budgets, they frequently end up spending a great deal of time on calculations and time lines, gaining experience in the kind of practical math used in business and household management. If time-on-task counts, and many basic skills proponents believe it does (Croll & Moses, 1988), we can expect project work to lead to a deeper understanding of what it takes to apply math to real life problems.

Skill gains in second language acquisition, particularly on the intermediate and advanced levels, are perhaps the easiest to see. Every aspect of project-based learning feeds into what Krashen (1985) has called the language acquisition device: the ability of the brain to acquire a second language through meaningful input and expression. We can expect proficiency to increase as the target language is used to investigate and discuss, to gain content knowledge by reading and talking with others, and to share ideas through writing. Engagement and involvement of this sort with another language is likely to result in greater "pragmatic competence" (Krashen): the ability to understand that language varies across contexts and to use language and literacy in socially appropriate ways.

Conclusion

Despite its many benefits, project-based learning in adult literacy should not be an end in itself, given the multiple goals and multiple learning needs of adults. It is perhaps best integrated into a comprehensive curriculum that allows for individual skill development as part of these group initiatives.

In the end, those of us who subscribe to a constructivist perspective and believe that we create our own knowledge through interaction with others and with texts may see the immediate benefits of project-based learning. Those of us who believe in more structured and direct models of teaching will remain skeptical. We all await research that can capture the many dimensions of learning that project-based learning addresses: gaining meaning from reading authentic materials; writing for an audience; communicating with others outside of the classroom; working as part of a team; giving voice to one's opinions and ideas; and using literacy to effect change. In the meantime, we may have to take project-based learning on faith and see it as a promising approach that reflects much of what we know about the way adults learn.

Endnotes

1 For an example of what worked and what did not during different phases of a project, read the evaluation component of the *1997-98 Learning Project Summary* by Anson Green. It can be found on the Internet at http://members.aol.com/CulebraMoon/mujer.html.

2 For a discussion of the relationship between educational philosophies and instructional practice in adult literacy programs, see Wrigley, H.S. & Guth, G. (1992). *One Size Does Not Fit All*. San Diego: Dominie Press.

3. For an example of such a project, see Shor, I. (1987b). *Monday Morning Fever: Critical Literacy and the Generative Theme of "Work" in Freire for the Classroom*. 104-121. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.

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Turning Obstacles into Opportunities

Students can help alleviate problems in their communities, but they must take care of themselves, too

by Deborah L. Johnson

My name is Deborah L. Johnson and I have lived in the city of Hartford, Connecticut, all my life. I'm a single parent who has dealt with the issues faced by many of the students I teach and counsel. It is important for them to know that, like me, they can turn their obstacles into opportunities, and that they too can have an impact on their communities.

I teach life skills classes for adult basic education, pre-GED, and GED students. One Saturday, I attended a conference sponsored by the Voter Education, Registration, and Action (VERA) project in Massachusetts. The topic of the conference was how to get students involved in their communities. Afterwards, I decided to do a project with my pre-GED class. I thought it would be a great opportunity for them to really see what is or is not happening in their neighborhoods as they worked on their social and literacy skills.

My class of 19 was made up of a lot of different personalities, cultures, and beliefs. The students were immigrants and native-born Americans from many backgrounds. Their ages ranged from 16 to 78. Establishing common ground was a project in itself.

Defining Community

Our first step was to discuss and write about what a community was. We talked about the issues that affected the students' communities. At the beginning, the students felt that their neighborhoods differed, but as they talked they started to realize that they all faced many of the same issues. I asked "How would you go about changing your community?" A lot of students felt that they couldn't, blaming other people, systems, and lack of power. After more discussions, the students decided they did want to try to make a difference in their communities. We went around the room, taking turns stating problems we thought were affecting the community, and why we thought they were happening. The list of issues included teen pregnancy, drugs, gang violence, education, homelessness, respect, self-esteem, racism, law, unity, child abuse, domestic violence, peer mediation, kids killing kids, addiction, careers, family unity, and police brutality. The list of reasons was also long.

We needed to narrow down the list to the most serious problems. After more discussion, they came up with teen pregnancy, drugs and gang violence, respect, and homelessness. The class decided to put together a survey to get input from the community on these topics. The class broke into groups, one group per topic, according to interest. We also appointed one facilitator per group. The groups came up with five questions for each topic. Some of the questions were: What is an ideal

community? Why do you think people are homeless? What ways is respect demonstrated in the community? What ways is it not? How is your community affected by drugs? This group work helped the students develop not only literacy but also social skills.

The students went into different neighborhoods to conduct the survey, interviewing people at schools, churches, different businesses, talking to a total of about 85 people. Once we had the reponses, we read them and began to discuss some of the concerns and comments that were made by folks in the community. The class compared the answers from neighborhood to neighborhood.

Support System

This process made me think about something that I really never even took into consideration before: how the comments would affect the students. One morning, while going over the comments in the surveys, a few of the students got into a very heated conversation about being homeless. I observed them without interrupting and came to realize that these issues were reality for some of the folks in the room.

We had planned originally to do only class presentations and educate each other, but as we talked we came to the conclusion that we needed to give the information out to others in the community. We thought about meeting with parents, but then thought that the process of change should start with kids. A lot of the students in the class felt that made the most sense.

The students decided that they would like to put together a forum for the junior high school students. The students chose junior high because they felt that this is when peer pressure kicks in. They believed that the younger students need to know that there were better opportunities in life. I felt that the forum was an excellent idea, but, thinking of some of the heated discussions we had had, I also felt the need to help my students develop a support system before taking the project any further. For the forum to be successful, we had to take care of ourselves first.

> *"...we came to the conclusion that we needed to give the information out to others in the community..."*

I decided to do an exercise called memory lane with the students. I asked the students to visualize way back to being in the womb, and then think through their lives up to the present. I asked them to think of the people in their lives, both those who had been supportive and those who had not. The students were really emotional. We identified a common bond: we all have life struggles and our pain is not unique. There was a lot of pain in the room that day and I even tapped into some things that were not resolved for me. Support groups, going to the healing ministry, writing good-bye letters to our grief, group cries, prayer, praise, pampering our child within, and lots of hugs and unconditional love carried us through the healing process.

After this, the project seemed to be heading in the right direction. Group dynamics were changing. The students were demanding that they respect each other's right to a difference of opinion. They insisted that nobody use inappropriate language. They asked each other to be on time; those who were absent or late had to make sure to get the information they needed so the project would not be affected. As for the survey information, we were working on separating facts from opinions, and developing recommendations for solving the problems of the community.

Motivation Lags

Spring was coming and the weather was beginning to break. The students were starting to enjoy the spring weather more than the classes; even the most motivated students' interest was starting to drop off. The group facilitators were becoming discouraged because the groups were not holding up and they felt as if they would not accomplish what they had set out to do. I was really quite disappointed that the students were losing interest, but the important thing for me was that I keep those students who were still involved working on the forum. I organized the students into those who were not going to participate and those who were. Those who were not going to participate became the audience, so that those who were going to present could get a feel for what it would be like.

One afternoon the students and I had a class discussion on the issues we had chosen to work on. We were still deciding how we would present them to the junior high school students. One student, who was 16, said she would like to develop a panel. Panel members would speak on a personal note about the topics teen pregnancy, drugs and gang violence, respect, and homelessness. I thought this was an excellent idea, but I wasn't quite sure the students

"...they felt like they can and did make a difference in the lives of the young people..."

would want to get that personal.

The students who were selected to sit on the panel were Taliea Hatcher, teen pregnancy; John Doe, homelessness; Tylon Jarrett, gangs and violence; and Isylma Wharton, respect. Finally, the day arrived for the forum. The students were both nervous and excited. The forum was held at Lewis Fox Middle School. We received permission to conduct the forum with the students in the inside suspension room. This is where children are detained for violation of school rules or disrespectful behavior. We chose inside suspension because these children were making poor choices for themselves. We wanted to help them turn their obstacles into opportunities. The principal helped provide us with a larger audience by sending some of the hard to reach children, who had visited inside suspension in the past, back to attend the forum, too.

A total of 17 students attended the forum, mainly young men. I began by introducing the panel and sharing what it was like preparing for the forum. I talked about some of the issues that we had discussed, and briefed them on the background of each panelist. First, Taliea discussed teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Seven months pregnant with her first child, she spoke with the students about making wrong decisions in her life and the disadvantages of becoming pregnant at a young age. She spoke about the difficulty she was having carrying her baby. She talked about her misconceptions about how much fun it would be having a baby. The audience listened carefully as they saw a former student of Lewis Fox share about this issue. Taliea then began to tell the students about sexually transmitted diseases, and the risks she took with her own life by having sex without using a condom. The junior high school students seemed to be really interested in what she had to say. In the discussion that followed, the students talked about peer pressure and about moving too fast into commitments for which they were not ready. They expressed their gratitude to her.

John Doe

The next speaker did not want to use his name during the forum, so he called himself John Doe. He started out discussing the community he lives in and the advantages and disadvantages to growing up in the hood. He is a very intelligent young man, both academically and street wise. I admired the way he conducted his conversation with the students. In the beginning, he spoke in slang, and as he talked about how he grew and changed, so did his language. Students caught on to this change without him pointing it out to them. During the question and answer period, quite a few students brought the change in his speech to his attention. John discussed how he had lived both sides of the world. He started out as a productive member of society and then he became the stereotypical homeless bum and drug addict. He lost everything and ended up bouncing from shelter to shelter, living anywhere he could lay his head. He urged the students to stay in school, to trust and believe in themselves, and never to let anyone tell them that they cannot accomplish their goals in life. He encouraged students to hold themselves in high esteem, because they deserve it. He told them that no matter where they came from or what they have been through, they can make it in this world. The students had tons of comments and questions. They related to John's story and expressed a lot of similarities. They commended him on how he turned his life around. John demonstrated that he was no longer a victim, but a victor.

Isylma, the oldest of the panel members, is from Jamaica and enjoys learning and supporting positive causes. I found it quite interesting that she had chosen to speak to the students on respect. I admire her no-nonsense attitude. I also found it interesting that she felt the reason children didn't have respect for themselves or for each other is because they did not receive respect at home. During preparation for the forum, I must say I was kind of skeptical about Isylma because she has a very bold spirit. Unless you know her, she can be a handful. But she was awesome. I saw how, in the beginning, the students didn't want to hear anything she was trying to deliver. So she spoke to the students on a personal level and shared lots of information about her culture and the way she was brought up. She talked a lot about respecting yourself in all that you do.

Tylon spoke with the students on drugs and gang violence. He talked about wanting to be a part of a gang, and the advantages and disadvantages of being in a gang. He shared some of the details of his personal life, including losing his daughter and his girlfriend from gang retaliation. These deaths caused great pain. He talked to the students with sincere honesty. He expressed his concerns about the youth today and how important education is. Ty

shared about how hard it was for him to get out of the gang, and about how he had to relocate because of the name he had made for himself. Today, he wants to work with youth to help keep them from going astray. Ty was brutally honest about gang life. He encouraged the young people to stay in school. The students shared their feelings about peer pressure, and about being bullied for not being part of a gang. They really talked back and forth with Ty, as he told his story.

Reflections

The junior high students seemed to enjoy the forum. They asked questions and the teachers asked if we would do it again. The students who participated in putting this together, as well as those who sat on the panel, really developed some great leadership skills. They were able to develop unity. I believe strongly that they felt like they can and did make a difference in the lives of the young people, as well as their own.

Working with the students on this project was a rewarding experience. Although it was time consuming, the more we developed the forum, the more growth occurred in the students as well as in myself. We have learned how to put forums together, and to gather data and use it to achieve our visions. Students learned better writing, research, public speaking, and advocacy skills; they learned brainstorming and conflict resolution, planning, and patience. They bonded and became leaders. Most important, they learned the vital role they play in their communities.

About the Author

Deborah L. Johnson has been at the Urban League of Greater Hartford in Harford, Connecticut, for three years as a life skills teacher and an AIDs counselor. Her mission is youth and young adults.

Voter Education, Registration, and Action (VERA)

For several years, we at the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) have made civic literacy and community participation one of our priorities. Through the Voter Education, Registration, and Action (VERA) project, we have worked to build the capacity of programs to integrate these areas into basic education and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) teaching. As part of the VERA project, in 1998, four regional teams of teachers investigated how and with what support they could use community involvement projects for developing skills in literacy and participatory democracy.

Each regional team was facilitated by a practitioner convenor, who guided the group in a three-tiered inquiry process. First, teachers worked with their own classes to identify community connections, concerns, and questions, and then to consider ways the group could intervene to make a difference. Second, they developed their own inquiry questions about trying to facilitate such a community action project within their various teaching contexts and constraints. And third, they documented their work so that the NELRC, with the team convenors, could analyze the collective experience and learn how best to support such projects in the future.

The teachers shared their data in team meetings; it was discussed and compared in convenor meetings, and fully analyzed by VERA staff. In the future, we will build in time and resources to support an inclusive process throughout. The collective data from the four teams led us to the following conclusions about what people need to become active:

A sense of connection to a community or an issue. These connections were discovered as groups discussed questions such as what community means, which communities people feel part of, and their vision of healthier communities.

To find role models in ourselves or others. As demonstrated by Deborah Johnson's class, groups approached this by talking about the ways local folks have taken control of their own lives or made a difference in the community. In this way, people are reminded of their own ability to contribute and that change is possible.

Skills that prepare us to take informed action. These might include research, interviewing, public speaking, advocacy, media literacy, organizing, and the underlying basic communication skills. In the VERA projects, the practice and rehearsal of these skills was crucial for preparing people to act with knowledge and confidence.

To act on what we learned, we are putting together a *Civic Literacy and Community Involvement Sourcebook* that builds on the ideas, models, and materials developed through VERA and other participatory democracy projects. Look for announcements regarding its availability.

— Andrea Nash

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research

Transformational Learning in Adulthood

By Kathryn Portnow, Nancy Popp, Maria Broderick, Eleanor Drago-Severson, and Robert Kegan

The Transformational Learning Project (TLP) is one of many research projects under the umbrella of NCSALL. Our particular focus is on the process of transformational learning in adulthood. In this paper we describe our project and its goals, then provide a brief introduction to the theoretical framework on which our work is based.

Project Focus

The TLP makes a distinction between informational and transformational learning. In our view, informational learning is learning that primarily focuses on the acquisition of more skills and an increased fund of knowledge. We define transformational learning as learning that not only increases knowledge but, more importantly, leads to deep and pervasive shifts in the learner's perspective and understanding. A quick example of this distinction, drawn from the cognitive realm, involves the difference between concrete and abstract thinking. If one is bound by concrete thinking in the study of, let us say, history, then further learning might involve the mastery of more historical facts, events, characters, and outcomes; but further learning might also involve the development of a capacity to think abstractly so that one can ask more general, thematic questions about the facts, or consider the perspectives and biases of those who wrote the historical account creating the "facts." Both kinds of learning are expansive and valuable, one within a pre-existing frame of mind, and the other reconstructing the very frame. The first we call informational learning; the second we call transformational.

In our view, transformational learning relates to the expansion or enhanced complexity in the very way people understand the world and their experiences. It focuses on changes in how people know. We link adult growth and competence in one's role as parent, worker, or learner to transformational change, not informational change.

As a group of developmental psychologists interested in adult development, we hold the notion that most adults in mainstream American culture are "in over their heads" (Kegan, 1994) when it comes to meeting the demands of modern life, e.g., balancing and prioritizing the multiple tasks, expectations, and roles associated with being an adult. Furthermore, we believe that the pervasive shifts that occur in transformational learning help adult students to more fully and broadly integrate in their lives the basic facts and skills gathered via informational learning. In this way, what students learn may be more transferable, generalizable, and flexible within and across the roles of adulthood.

From our research on adult basic education learners' internal experience of change within their educational programs, we hope to learn more about and gain a better understanding of how the processes of transformation actually occur. Our hope is to deepen knowledge about how best to promote and support the process of learning, transformation, and role competency in adults by bringing our theoretical perspective to this research on adult basic education. Our developmental framework is relatively new (Kegan, 1982) and, as such, it has not been widely applied to different populations. Consequently, we are hoping to learn how our theoretical framework applies to and may be informed by an adult literacy population, comprised of minority populations and non-native speakers of English. At the broadest level, we seek to support all adults in enhancing their capacities for managing the complexities of work and life.

Our project explores transformational learning in three adult roles — worker, parent, and formal learner — in three distinct settings: an adult diploma program at Polaroid Corporation of Waltham, Massachusetts, run by the Continuing Education Institute (CEI) of Watertown, Massachusetts; the Cambridge Even Start Family Literacy Program in Cambridge, Massachusetts; and an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) program at Bunker Hill Community

College (BHCC) in Charlestown, Massachusetts. We selected these sites for our research because each has a long-standing history of excellence and a very student-centered philosophy. We are interviewing approximately 15 to 20 students in each site, for a total of 54 students. Data collection started in April of 1998, and will continue through July of 1999.

Process-Based Study

In each of the three research settings, we are talking individually with all learners to hear from them, in their own words, about what is most helpful and matters most to them in their learning. We also hope to hear about any experiences that the learners have had that felt pivotal to them in some way and led to a change in perspective, perhaps an "aha!" moment, if they can identify one. We wish to learn about the students' internal experiences of change to understand how to promote and support the process of transformation. Our project is a process-based study: we are interested in the processes of the students' learning more than in the content of what they learn. To this end, we are following the students through the process of their experience in these three programs over a nine- to 12-month period. We will be tracking their motivations for learning, their expectations for themselves and their teachers, their sense of themselves in their respective roles. Our purpose is to understand better what the actual processes of transformation look like, and what supports or enhances these kinds of transformations in adult literacy learners.

To gather this information, we use a variety of interviews and data collection tools in one-on-one meetings with each participant. In one interview we ask our participants specifically about their prior and current learning experiences; in another, we explore how participants make sense of themselves and the world. In yet another interview, we ask participants to create maps or pictures of how they see themselves in the specific role of the setting. We also present a problem-solving dilemma relevant to their role. We conduct these interviews with each learner at the beginning and end of the program, and a subset of these interviews in the middle of the program. We are also holding periodic focus groups and classroom observations to learn more about the cohort's collective experience in the program. In addition, we are interviewing the teachers to compare their expectations and practices with the learners' key experiences. We take the position that the learners and teachers are experts on their own experience and have much to teach us about what works best.

Each program is organized around a strong cohort model: the same group of students go through the program together. Program

Ways of Understanding in Adulthood

Instrumental Way of Understanding
- Defined by one's self-interest, concrete needs, purposes, plans, and wants.
- Characterized by dualistic thinking, concerns with concrete consequences: "Will I get caught/punished? How can I get the things I want? Will I lose my job?"
- Others are seen as either obstacles or pathways to getting one's own concrete needs met.
- Reliance on rules.
- Not capable of abstract thought.
- **The Golden Rule** = "I'll do to you what you do to me."

Socializing Way of Understanding
- Self defined by opinions and expectations of others.
- Feels empathy; feels responsible for others' feelings; holds others responsible for own feelings.
- Concerned with abstract psychological consequences: "Am I still a good person? Do you still like/love/value me? Do I still belong?"
- Intolerant of ambiguity. Reliance on external authority.
- Capable of abstract thinking, thinking about thinking.
- Criticism experienced as destructive to the self.
- **The Golden Rule** = "I should do for you what I hope and need and expect you should do for me."

Self-Authoring Way of Understanding
- Self defined by its own internal authority.
- Can hold contradictory feelings simultaneously.
- Concerned with consequences for personal integrity and meeting one's own standards: "Am I competent? Am I living/working/loving up to my full potential?
- Am I upholding my own values and standards?"
- Integrates others' perspectives, including criticism and other perspectives according to own internally generated standards and values.
- Reliance on own authority.
- **The Golden Rule** = "Doing for each other supports each of us in meeting our own self-defined values, ideals, and goals and helps preserve the social order."

— Popp & Portnow (1998)

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directors have told us that the cohort experience seems to encourage student retention. For those students who do drop out, we will conduct follow-up interviews with them to the extent possible. Students are compensated for the time they spend being interviewed with us. We think that this is a respectful way to thank the students for their time and help, and that such recognition may encourage students to remain in the project.

Basic Principles

Our project on transformational learning in adulthood is based on research conducted over the last 20 years that has taught us that clear links exist between children's and adults' development (Basseches, 1984; Belenky et al., 1986; Commons et al., 1984; Daloz, 1986; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1952; Weathersby, 1976). Two basic principles from this research will orient the reader to our developmental view of adulthood.

The first principle is that development is a lifelong process. The same processes that underlie children's development continue throughout adulthood. Adults' minds continue to grow and become more complex. The research shows that development is gradual and that it varies within and across individuals. We can all see in our observations of children that development is a slow and evolving process. The same is true of adult development. While some theorists (Erikson, 1963; Gould, 1978; Levinson et al., 1978; Neugarten, 1968; Sheehey, 1976) define development in terms of age and life phase, e.g. adolescence, adulthood, middle age, old age, the processes of development we look at have been shown to be independent of both age and phase (Beukema, 1990; Broderick, 1996; Goodman, 1983; Guido, 1994; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Popp, 1998; Portnow, 1996; Sonnenschein, 1990; Stein, 1991). Developmental transformations can take years to occur, and every person moves at a different and unique pace.

The second principle is that development is more than the accumulation of new information and skills; it is a qualitative change in the very ways that adults know and make sense of their world. It is, again, a kind of learning that leads to deep and pervasive shifts in one's perspective and understanding of oneself, one's relationships and one's goals. As stated earlier, we link adult growth to transformational change, not informational change.

Learners' Understanding of Education

Instrumental Way of Understanding

"What's in it for me?"

- Knowledge is a kind of "possession," an accumulation of skills, facts and actions that yield solutions; a means to an end. You "get it" and then you "have it."
- Knowledge is right or wrong.
- Knowledge comes from external authority that tells you the right skills, facts, and rules you need to produce the results to get what you want.
- Knowledge helps one meet one's own concrete needs and goals, and obtain instrumental outcomes.
- Education is to get X.

Socializing Way of Understanding

"What do you think I should know?"

- Knowledge is general information one should know for the required social roles and to meet expectations of teachers/authorities.
- Knowledge is equated with objective truth.
- Knowledge comes from higher authorities and experts who hand down truth and understanding. Authorities and experts are the source of the legitimate knowledge and informed opinions.
- Knowledge helps one to meet cultural and social expectations, gain acceptance and entry into social roles, and feel a sense of belonging.
- Education is to be X.

Self-authoring Way of Understanding

"What do I want to know; what is important to me to keep learning and growing?"

- Knowledge is understood as a construction, truth, a matter of context. Bodies of knowledge and theories are seen as models for interpreting and analyzing experience.
- Knowledge comes from one's interpretation and evaluation of standards, values, perceptions, deductions, and predictions.
- Knowledge comes from a self-generated curiosity and sense of responsibility for one's own learning.
- Knowledge helps to enrich one's life, to achieve a greater competence according to one's own standards, to deepen one's understanding of self and world to participate in the improvement of society.
- Education is to become X.

(Adapted from R. Weathersby, A Synthesis of Research and Theory on Adult Development: Its Implications for Adult Learning and Postsecondary Education, 1976, pp. 88-89)

Ways of Understanding

In our research, we use as an organizing framework the three developmental levels that are most common in adulthood. These levels represent three broadly different ways of understanding and interpreting one's experience. These three developmental levels, like each

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of those in childhood, are sequential and qualitatively distinct from each other. Each has its own logic, while building on and integrating each previous level. We refer to these as the Instrumental Way of Understanding, the Socializing Way of Understanding, and the Self-Authoring Way of Understanding (Kegan, 1982, 1994, Kegan & Lahey, in preparation). These levels are described in the box on page 23.

A given way of understanding may influence one's experience of oneself, others, and events. It may frame how one defines and understands one's many adult roles. In our research, we are concerned with how these ways of understanding affect the ways in which adults think about themselves as workers, parents, and learners. For example, one's way of understanding shapes what one sees as one's responsibilities as a student and how one thinks about what makes a good student. It frames one's conceptions of what knowledge is. One's way of understanding frames one's motives and goals for learning, fashioning what one wants from one's education, and what one expects from oneself and one's teachers.

While there are many differences in the ways that individuals using different ways of understanding construct their expectations, goals, and motives for learning, there is also a great deal of regularity in the ways people using the same way of understanding experience these things. On page 24 is a description of how different developmental ways of understanding may impact one's view of education. This table suggests how these ways of understanding might affect a person's definition of knowledge, understanding of the source of knowledge, and sense of the goals and purpose of education.

Linking Theory and Practice

We believe that the demands on adults often outpace their current level of development. In modern American culture, as educators, as fellow adults, we all have expectations about what adults should be able to do and how they should be able to do it. Often these expectations go unexamined and are beyond what an individual adult has the capacity to do. The usefulness of our developmental framework lies in the insight it provides into the kinds of expectations held for adults and

Equipped for the Future and the Transformational Learning Project

For the last two years, the Transformational Learning Project team has been working collaboratively with the National Institute for Literacy's Equipped for the Future (EFF) initiative. The purpose of our collaboration is to integrate our developmental perspective with EFF's new customer-driven framework for adult literacy and lifelong learning.

Equipped for the Future is a collaborative, standards-based system reform initiative. The goal of EFF is to focus the literacy system on producing results that matter to our students, our communities, and our funders. To achieve this goal, EFF has worked with partners in 17 states across the country to develop a set of Adult Performance Standards that "define what adults need to know and be able to do in order to carry out their roles as parents and family members, citizens and community members, and workers" (EFF: *A New Framework for Adult Learning, Field Development Institute Manual*, February, 1998, p.3). These standards are based on adults' self-defined learning needs as parents, workers, and citizens.

The TLP and EFF share a common interest in conceptualizing adult literacy as something bigger than the acquisition of basic skills. Both are working to reframe adult literacy and lifelong learning to focus on adult competence, broadly conceived. While the TLP's three research settings are not EFF partner sites, our teams maintain an ongoing, mutually informative collaboration in which we explore the theoretical, conceptual, and research interests of both projects. The TLP also participates in EFF's working sessions and field institutes.

A specific contribution of the TLP team to EFF's efforts in developing an assessment framework for the new Standards of Adult Performance is the creation of the Developmental Skill Matrices. These matrices show the different ways in which the same skills may be understood, performed, or enacted, very differently at each of the developmental levels of adulthood. The matrices will provide a map for literacy educators and administrators that helps them understand the ways in which their students make sense of things. Using it, they can design programs and learning situations that engage students and help them achieve their goals by taking into account the students' struggles and more effectively building on students' real strengths. In addition, TLP and EFF hope to join forces to offer a Teacher Training Institute in the summer of 2000 that integrates what has been learned from both projects.

For more info on EFF, contact: Sondra Stein, EFF Project Director, NIFL, 800 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC, 20006

how the adult might be meeting or not meeting those expectations. In collaboration with the National Institute for Literacy's Equipped for the Future initiative (see box on thi page), we have created the Developmental Skills Matrices, (p.26), to give a clearer picture of how one might use our developmental framework in a very practical way to help clarify our expectations and our students' capacities. The following excerpt from one of the skill matrices describes how specific skills in a particular context — in this case, the skills recommended for working together effectively — might be understood and enacted by someone in each of the three ways of understanding described above.

One question adult literacy practitioners have asked us is how to work with students who may be at different levels of literacy skills. In response, we first wonder whether these learners are not just different in their skill level but are, in fact, bound by different ways of understanding as suggested by the above matrix. In our view, one way to work with adult learners of varying levels is to think about how we, as educators, can create learning environments that appropriately support and challenge adults who may have different ways of understanding. We know that optimal learning environments do several critical things (Daloz, 1986; Drago-Severson, 1996; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, in preparation). First, optimal learning environments offer a good mix of support and challenge. Support is defined as joining, affirming or acknowledging where a person is, how s/he thinks or feels. We define challenge as gently questioning how a person feels and thinks with the hope of raising questions, pushing the limits of one's current ways of thinking, and exposing the learner to new perspectives.

Second, optimal learning environments consider and take into account the match between the expectations of the program and the readiness of the learner. In our view, learning is enhanced when there is a good match between the learner's way of understanding and the implicit developmental demands of the curriculum. Here we are speaking about paying attention to what way of understanding the curriculum requires of the learner. We know, for example, that if a program's expectations aim too high, a learner may feel demoralized or overwhelmed and retreat. Conversely, if a program's expectations are aimed too low, then a student may become bored and disengaged. Thus, knowledge of both a student's way of understanding and the implicit developmental demands of the program may help educators to support and challenge students even

Developmental Perspectives on Working Together
(Popp, 1998)

	Instrumental	Socializing	Self-Authoring
Perspective on Working Together	Everybody doing their job and doing it the right way	Forming an identity as a group with a common, mutual goal that everyone is in agreement with	A complex network of people of differing values, opinions, experience and perspective joining together for a common purpose
Decision-Making Skills	Decisions and issues have a right and wrong aspect with no in-between; there is right way and a wrong way to do things	Decision needs group consensus or agreement, and it is necessary to arrive at one agreed upon group decision	Decisions have many possible paths; coming to them is an exploration of many options; there is not necessarily one "best" decision, but many possible decision, each with pros and cons
Interpersonal Skills	Cooperates by arguing or persuading others to agree to the right thing to do and the right way to do it; "right" beind dictated by the rules	Cooperates by trying to build agreement; minimize conflict, disagreement and differences	Cooperates by ensuring that everyone's voice is heard, regardless of opinion; celebrates differences, makes room for all perspectives, works toward fair and workable compromises
Life-Long Learning Skills	Open to learning new facts, new concrete ways of doing things if it furthers concrete self-interests	Open to learning new ways of thinking and acting if it fits group ideology or already held beliefs, or if it further sense of belonging to the group	Open to engaging with new perspectives, challenging own assumptions, broadening own vision with new ideas and input
Communication Skills	Communicates by stating rules, opinions, concrete goals, facts; not concerned with theories, philosophies or others' feelings except as they have an impact on getting the job done	Communicates feelings, concern and sense of responsibility for others' feelings and experience; makes sure everyone understands and agrees with each other	Communicates feelings, ideas, philosophies in attempt to express own view within larger group, to explain and understand differences, similarities, and complexities of everyone's perspective

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more effectively (Daloz, 1986; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, in preparation).

Ongoing Thoughts

As we progress through this research, we are already hearing from the students and their teachers that they have experienced meaningful changes in the ways that they think and feel about themselves as a result of being in their respective programs. Students are telling us that they are already feeling more confident about sharing their opinions, and speaking up for themselves. Some students have told us that they feel that their classes are helping them to do their jobs better and to become better people. In the fall of 2000, at the end of our project, we hope to present a rich portrait of the different kinds of changes the students have experienced in their participation in these educational programs. From these portraits we hope will emerge a clearer map that highlights and illuminates the complexities of the processes of transformation. With this knowledge, we, as educators, might even more effectively support the growth of adults as life-long learners through the 21st century.

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